

BELDEN RUSSONELLO & STEWART
RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Choices Between Asphalt and Nature: Americans Discuss Sprawl

Analysis of 20 Focus Groups
Across the U.S.

Conducted for The Biodiversity Project
in partnership with
The Nature Conservancy

by
Belden Russonello & Stewart

February 1998

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction and methods** 1
 - A. Introduction 1
 - B. Methods 2

- II. Executive summary and conclusions** 6
 - A. Executive summary 6
 - B. Conclusions 10

- III. Review of public opinion on housing choices** 12

- IV. Analysis of focus groups** 14
 - A. Values and attitudes that underlie housing decisions 14
 - B. Sprawl development -- what does it mean and what are its implications for the future 22
 - C. Arguments for controlling sprawl: Why should I care? 32
 - D. Looking for solutions: Policies to fight sprawl 44

- Appendix: Housing descriptions presented in focus groups**

I. Introduction and methods

A. Introduction

Almost two years ago, The Biodiversity Project's national survey (conducted by Belden & Russonello and R/S/M) revealed that a large percentage of Americans were broadly concerned about the pace of development and the resulting loss of nature in their communities. A question about the seriousness of ten different environmental problems indicated that Americans considered "the rate at which land is being developed and places in nature are being lost" one of the most serious environmental problems in the country, as urgent as air or water quality.

The Biodiversity Project became interested in investigating how to turn this ripple of public opinion into a sea change of attitudes on development and sprawl. The Project asked Belden & Russonello (now Belden Russonello & Stewart [BR&S]) to design a set of focus groups that would take the first steps toward informing environmental and other interested groups in how to educate the public about the connection between sprawl development and the destruction of habitat and species.

The Biodiversity Project's scope was nation-wide and it collaborated with The Nature Conservancy to include a segment of the work in California. Funding for the research came from the Surdna Foundation, the Turner Foundation, the Frey Foundation, the Americana Foundation, the Bullitt Foundation, and Californians and the Land.

Our study focused on the values and attitudes that will affect how Americans confront development pressures now and in the future, especially in relation to development's effects on natural habitats and species. Our inquiry addresses several relevant questions: Is sprawl a problem that Americans want to fix, or feel capable of fixing? What are the implications of sprawl that are meaningful to Americans' lives, and are there connections to nature? Are there actions that Americans will take to stop or control sprawl? Are there ways to plan communities that can be both appealing to people and sustainable?

We know from national surveys that six in ten Americans would not even consider buying a home in a major American city,¹ and that at its core the issue of preventing sprawl and promoting better land use is about making the cities more livable. But, we also know that the task of generating more livable cities is a long-term effort, and that even with more livable cities, many Americans will still want to live outside of town.

Therefore, this initial research on sprawl is designed to learn how to build recognition of the costs of sprawl among those Americans who now own a home in the suburbs and among those who rent but are expecting to buy a suburban house. This emphasis on attitudes of suburbanites or soon-to-be suburbanites places our inquiry at the center of the controversy, where Americans are making decisions that impact the trade-offs between asphalt and nature.

This report begins with a section on public opinion on housing choices, and our findings on values and attitudes which underlie decisions on the types of communities in which people want to live. Next, we explore the range of opinions toward sprawl development, land use, and arguments for controlling sprawl. While we uncover some serious barriers to action, we also discover some ways to overcome those barriers, including reactions to policies to fight sprawl.

In using this analysis, readers should keep in mind that focus groups are qualitative research and are not intended to quantify public attitudes on issues. Our purpose is to look closely at attitude formation and to discover the range of opinions and beliefs on the topics at hand; the different ways in which people react to specific pieces of information; how they evaluate information; and the judgments that people reach based on that information.

B. Methods

A total of 20 focus groups were conducted in nine locations across America between October 6 and November 17, 1997. Twelve focus groups were conducted for The Biodiversity Project between October 6 and October 30 in six cities:

Charles County, MD;
Atlanta, GA;
West Palm Beach, FL;
Boise, ID;
Traverse City, MI; and
Grand Rapids, MI.

¹ Fannie Mae National Housing Survey; N = 1,652, April 1997.

Eight focus groups were conducted for The Nature Conservancy between November 15 and 17 in three California cities:

Van Nuys,
South San Francisco, and
Modesto.

In every location except Atlanta, we conducted at least one group with Caucasian homeowners and one with Caucasian renters who are looking to purchase a home in the near future. In Atlanta, one group was held with African-American homeowners and one with Caucasian homeowners. We also conducted two groups among Latino renters who are looking to purchase a home -- one group in Van Nuys and another in South San Francisco.

In every group except for Atlanta and Grand Rapids, all participants were suburbanites. The Atlanta and Grand Rapids groups included both city and suburban residents. The make-up of each focus group represented a mix of genders, ages, education levels, parents and non-parents, political party identification, and income levels. However, most participants had household incomes above \$25,000 a year. A table on the following page outlines the key demographic characteristics of the focus group participants.

A basic discussion guide was developed by BR&S, with advice and help from The Biodiversity Project and numerous experts on sprawl from across the nation. Although the basic outline of inquiry remained consistent across all the groups, the guide was altered slightly in each location to include specific references to local issues. The groups were moderated by BR&S partners John Russonello and Kate Stewart, except for the African-American group, which was moderated by Donita Buffalo of Buffalo Market Research.

Composition of participants

	<u>Homeowners</u>	<u>Renters</u>
City: Atlanta	19	N/A
Boise	6	8
Charles County	9	10
Grand Rapids	9	7
Traverse City	10	8
West Palm Beach	10	8
Van Nuys	10	16
San Francisco	8	16
Modesto	8	8
Gender: Female	49	40
Male	40	41
Race: Caucasian	80	65
African American	9	N/A
Latino	N/A	16
Age: 21 to 29 years	5	26
30 to 39 years	14	27
40 to 49 years	27	21
50 to 59 years	22	6
60 years and older	21	1
Children under 18: Yes	55	47
No	34	34
Political party: Republican	33	21
Democrat	26	28
Independent	27	27
Undeclared	3	5
Income: Under \$25,000	--	10
\$25,000 to \$50,000	36	45
\$51,000 to \$100,000	44	23
Over \$100,000	8	3
Don't know/Refuse	1	--
Occupation: Professional white collar	29	11
White collar	47	44
Skilled blue collar	10	21
Unskilled blue collar	2	2
Unemployed	1	3
Education: High school	14	18
Some college/ Vo-tech	21	33
College graduate	30	25
Post graduate	24	5

In each location, we recruited participants from a wide range of surrounding towns. The following indicates the locations of the groups and the towns in which participants reside:

Charles County, MD:

<i>Accokeek</i>	<i>Lusby</i>	<i>Waldorf</i>
<i>Charlotte Hall</i>	<i>Temple Hills</i>	<i>White Plains</i>
<i>LaPlata</i>	<i>Upper Marlboro</i>	

Atlanta, GA:

<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Dunwoody</i>	<i>Riverdale</i>
<i>Decatur</i>	<i>Marietta</i>	<i>Stone Mountain</i>
<i>Duluth</i>	<i>Norcross</i>	

West Palm Beach, FL:

<i>Boynton Beach</i>	<i>Lantana</i>	<i>Wellington</i>
<i>Green Acres</i>	<i>Loxahatchee</i>	<i>West Palm Beach</i>
<i>Jupiter</i>	<i>Palm Beach Gardens</i>	
<i>Lake Worth</i>	<i>Royal Palm Beach</i>	

Boise, ID:

<i>Boise</i>	<i>Eagle</i>	<i>Meridian</i>
--------------	--------------	-----------------

Traverse City, MI:

<i>Kingsley</i>	<i>Sutton Bay</i>	<i>Traverse City</i>
<i>Mayfield</i>		

Grand Rapids, MI:

Grand Rapids

Van Nuys, CA:

<i>Burbank</i>	<i>Mission Hills</i>	<i>Santa Monica</i>
<i>Canoga Park</i>	<i>North Hills</i>	<i>Valley Village</i>
<i>Granada Hills</i>	<i>North Hollywood</i>	<i>Van Nuys</i>
<i>Los Angeles</i>	<i>Panorama City</i>	

South San Francisco, CA:

<i>Belmont</i>	<i>Foster City</i>	<i>San Bruno</i>
<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Half Moon Bay</i>	<i>San Mateo</i>
<i>Burlingame</i>	<i>Millbrae</i>	<i>South San Francisco</i>
<i>Daly City</i>	<i>Pacifica</i>	

Modesto, CA:

<i>Hilmar</i>	<i>North East Modesto</i>	<i>South East Modesto</i>
<i>Modesto</i>	<i>Riverbank</i>	<i>Turlock</i>

II. Executive summary and conclusions

A. Executive summary

“[Stopping sprawl] is almost like telling a child not to grow up.” -- female Grand Rapids renter

The 20 focus groups conducted in nine locations across the United States in October and November 1997 elicited a range of opinions on sprawl and the environment. These focus groups are a first step in understanding the public assessment of development pressures and their environmental costs. They are initial discussions that provide us with a sense of how Americans approach this complicated issue. The following analysis of the groups offers insights into how The Biodiversity Project, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, may begin to advance communications on sprawl issues to raise concerns that will move Americans to action.

1. Values are key. The core values that form the basis of Americans’ decisions on where to live are: responsibility to family, freedom, and appreciation of nature. These values are expressed in terms of Americans seeking safety, space, individuality, privacy, freedom of choice, convenience, natural surroundings, and a sense of community.

Not all of the values or attitudes are shared with the same intensity by all the American homeowners and renters in our focus groups, and some values are given higher priority than others, depending on the individual and circumstance. But, all of the core values are expressed broadly in the groups. Communications about housing and community that do not speak to these values run the risk of being irrelevant to Americans.

2. Choices about sprawl vs. non-sprawl housing divide between the need for space and convenience. When focus group participants are offered a choice between housing in a new sprawling development and an older neighborhood with houses closer together, the motivations for choosing sprawl housing are a quest for privacy, space, freedom to move out from the congested center, and love of nature. Those participants who choose a home in a more compact setting place a higher priority on convenience -- being closer to work, stores, recreational and cultural activities, and having a sense of community that comes from being close to your neighbors. Both preferences reflect core values of freedom, responsibility to family, and appreciation of nature.

3. Despite differences, Americans often seek similar community characteristics. Choosers of sprawl and those of non-sprawl developments in the focus groups share common reactions to many housing characteristics. Sidewalks are broadly appealing because they are synonymous with safety and community. Promoting narrow streets sends a message of increased traffic, blocked cars, and no parking rather than smoother traffic flow. Big yards are valued by most residents because they relate to privacy. The concept of a town square is vaguely comprehended as a positive but also reminiscent of a type of living that occurred in communities a long time ago and one that may not comport with participants' current sense of what they need in a community. Despite some support for mass transit, proximity to bus service is rarely a plus, since buses are too often seen as unreliable, unsafe, noisy, dirty, and inconvenient.

4. Diversity of backgrounds, not incomes, is appealing. Living in a diverse community is appealing to many participants and unappealing to others. Many homeowners and renters in our groups express strong interest in living in a community with many different types of people, and in raising their children among a diverse mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, living in a community with people of different income levels is often unappealing because some people worry about crime and lower property values if they live with people who make less money than they do; and some worry about not being accepted socially in a community of people who earn more than they do.

5. Understanding of sprawl is generally negative but confused. The word sprawl holds a generally negative connotation but some see benefits to sprawl. As a label, the word suffers from some confusion, meaning conflicting things to people. To some, it means a way out of current congestion, the ability to escape density, to move to a quiet place, and economic growth. To others, sprawl is uncontrolled growth that is spread out and ugly. To others, it means overcrowding, smog, and lack of green space. To still others, sprawl means a combination of all the above -- spread out congestion caused by unplanned growth.

The most common understanding of sprawl across the groups is its linkage to “unplanned development,” which accounts for its generally negative image. But as a label, sprawl does not offer one sure definition.

6. *Suburban development lacks individuality and freedom of choice.* Suburban development is seen as positive because it offers an escape from congested cities and it is planned (unlike sprawl), but negative because it usually means a loss of identity by living in a monotonous housing subdivision where all the houses look alike. This idea that suburban development is a monolithic wave of ugly tract housing repels many of the focus group participants who want to “move out.” Some will choose to stay closer in to the city if moving out means a loss of individuality.

7. *Problem labels: Cluster, mixed-use, and neo-traditional development.* The terms cluster development, mixed-use development, and neo-traditional development are largely unfamiliar and unappealing to our focus group participants. These types of development are not places most of our participants want to live because they often send messages opposite to the characteristics people want in their communities. Cluster connotes cramped, mixed-use means your neighbors are factories and 7-11 stores, and neo-traditional sounds like a sales pitch hiding an undesirable house. The term traditional housing is less offensive to people, but means different things to different people, so as to make it useless as a singular label to describe a type of housing.

8. *We cannot stop sprawl but we should control it.* Stopping sprawl is synonymous with trying to stop progress, with all of the positive and negative characteristics that go along with progress, according to our focus group participants across the country. It would be futile and counter-productive. However, most want to control sprawl to mitigate its negative consequences, such as pollution, the destruction of habitats for wildlife and open space, overcrowding, and monotonous housing developments. Another serious consequence of sprawl that people raise is the loss of certainty that their dream house in the perfect community may turn into a strip mall-bounded asphalt jungle in five years -- and they will need to move again.

9. *Environmental impacts are a key motivation for controlling sprawl.* Across all the groups, environmental concerns, such as preventing pollution and flooding from runoff and the loss of green space, are very strong reasons for controlling sprawl. Participants easily recognize the connection between sprawl development and loss of wetlands, forests, and other natural habitats, and they want to avoid these losses because they believe their health, their enjoyment and their children’s enjoyment of places in nature and wildlife are all threatened.

Protecting farmland is considered a paramount reason to control sprawl in our California groups, but a far less significant reason for homeowners and renters in other areas we visited across the country. The Californians are motivated by self-interest; they believe agriculture is the backbone of their state's economy and the guarantee of a safe and reliable food supply for them personally. In other locations, farmland is viewed as abundant and less important in an age of greater efficiency of farming methods.

The taxpayer cost of sprawl is a complicated argument, which is not as easily acknowledged. However if this argument is simplified to one of fairness, it may raise concerns about sprawl.

Other reasons to oppose sprawl, such as traffic congestion and a general anti-developer sentiment, are less connected to sprawl than is loss of natural areas. While traffic is a huge concern for many homeowners and renters in our groups, they feel there is no one cause and no escape from traffic. As for developers, the focus group participants tend to hold zoning boards, politicians, and citizens accountable to control developers.

10. *Create zones to control development and protect green space rather than set boundaries or pay for rights.* The homeowners and renters in our discussions endorse numerous ways of controlling sprawl: urban growth zones to control development, better planning, protecting open space through zoning and purchasing land for public use, and favoring existing communities through state government funding allocations for roads, schools, police, and other services.

They are less enthusiastic about government drawn boundaries, government funded pay-outs to farmers and other landowners, or doing away with new road construction.

11. *Planning is popular.* Better planning of development is raised spontaneously across the groups as a solution to sprawl. Our participants place the responsibility for planning across many groups, including zoning boards, local elected officials, builders, and people in their communities. Their ideas for planning focus on providing more parks and open space for recreation and saving green spaces in nature. The protection of the natural environment has a direct connection to sprawl in a way that tax and funding arguments do not.

12. *Roads equal short term progress.* Roads are equated with progress, but our focus group participants also express an awareness that roads are not the permanent solution to traffic. The problem is that participants often have difficulty seeing any long term solution to traffic, so they fall back on short term solutions --- widening the roads.

Participants reject a message that suggests we should replace road building with public transportation, but many of our homeowners and renters, particularly those in California, view public transportation as a necessary back-up to the automobile that could become more of a necessity in the future. Support for mass transit is viewed by many as part of good planning.

B. Conclusions

The focus group analysis presents those who communicate a message to control sprawl with two challenges: 1) what to call sprawl, and 2) how to demonstrate its threat to quality of life. The research offers possible ways to meet these challenges.

Themes

The research uncovered four main themes which may be incorporated into messages on sprawl.

1. Start with values. Frame communications in terms of the values that underlie concerns about sprawl. The focus groups identified three core value groups that promote support for controlling sprawl.

- *Responsibility to family and self.* Participants believe they themselves have a responsibility to maintain the quality of life for their families and themselves. This includes preventing pollution, saving parks and open spaces, finding affordable housing in safe, convenient communities where people have a sense of community and a certainty that their communities will last.
- *Personal enjoyment of nature.* Participants appreciate nature and natural beauty. This personal enjoyment of nature is expressed as enjoying nature's landscape, and appreciating wild creatures and wild places because they satisfy a human need for natural things.
- *Freedom.* This core value emerges in strong beliefs in individuality and freedom of choice when it comes to housing decisions. These values underlie the drive for privacy and space. Although these values can motivate some to move away from the city, they also prevent others from choosing to live in new communities that lack individuality and choice. If sprawl is seen as limiting the key values of individuality and choice, the impetus for controlling sprawl will gain in strength.

2. *Protecting green spaces.* Themes and images that convey the need to protect green spaces from sprawl are compelling to our focus group participants. Loss of places in nature is one of the central reasons participants are willing to control sprawl.

3. *Planning for growth.* None of the participants believe we can or should *stop* sprawl. However, almost all believe that planning will minimize the effects of sprawl. Planning for the future is a theme heard throughout the groups and is one that communicates to these homeowners and renters that we are not trying to stop progress but rather protecting what we have for the future.

The word and concept of sprawl

Since the word sprawl sends conflicting messages, it must be accompanied by an explanation of what is lost if we do not take steps to control sprawl, or what is worth protecting. For example, we want to convey that:

- Sprawl is unplanned and uncontrolled development that threatens our quality of life in many ways.
- Uncontrolled development threatens our green space and places in nature that humans enjoy, threatens our health because of pollution, and threatens our individuality and choice.
- Better planning and controlled development will provide our families with more open spaces in nature and healthier, and less congested communities.
- Better planning will provide more choices, more control over our communities, and security that our quality of life will be maintained.

III. Review of public opinion data on housing choices

The existing public opinion research makes it clear that most Americans want to live in a place where they feel safe and connected to their communities but still have their own space. In the 1997 Fannie Mae National Housing Survey, when asked where they want to live, a majority of Americans choose the suburbs (24%) or medium (20%) to small (24%) town, while fewer than one in 10 (9%) choose large cities (22% choose rural settings).² The preferred home of most Americans is a single-family detached house with a yard on all sides. In the Fannie Mae survey, seven in 10 (71%) Americans describe this as the ideal type of housing.

For large majorities of Americans, the most important criteria for deciding where to live are safety and security of the area, the school system, and the neighborhood -- more so than the type of home. A Gallup Organization survey found close to nine in 10 (89%) Americans say safety is very important while six in 10 (61%) say the school system is very important in deciding where to live. Of lesser concern is the nearness to work (44% very important), proximity of a shopping center (27%), and nearness to entertainment and cultural activities (17%).³

In addition, Americans are more particular about the neighborhood they choose to live in than the actual home. When it comes to a choice between having the ideal residence in a less than ideal neighborhood, or having a less than ideal residence in a better neighborhood, people choose neighborhood over type of house, 66% to 24%, according to the 1992 Fannie Mae National Housing Survey.⁴

The search for safety and good schools has meant moving to the suburbs for millions of Americans. Despite the rebound and improvement in the quality of life in many American

² Fannie Mae National Housing Survey; N = 1,652, April 1997.

³ Gallup Organization, conducted for U.S. News & World Report, CNN, and IBM; N = 820 adults, October 1995.

⁴ Fannie Mae National Housing Survey; N = 1,521, February-March 1992.

cities, public perceptions still favor the suburbs. The latest Fannie Mae National Housing Survey⁵ shows that perceived trends in cities and suburbs favor the suburbs except in matters of job creation and culture and entertainment.

- Overall, the quality of life over the past five years is perceived to have improved more in suburbs (66%) than in cities (13%).
- The suburbs (66%) are believed to be the site of a greater increase in home values than are cities (18%).
- By a five-to-one margin, Americans believe overcrowding and congestion have increased more in the past five years in cities (71%) than in suburbs (14%).
- By nearly a seven-to-one margin, Americans believe that “tensions among groups and racial tensions” have increased more in cities (66%) than in suburbs (10%).
- And, Americans believe “crime, violence, and gangs” have increased more in cities (64%) than in suburbs (17%).

On the positive side for cities, Americans believe:

- Job opportunities have increased more in cities (57%) than in suburbs (24%).
- The availability of entertainment and cultural events have increased more in cities (69%) than in suburbs (17%).

When it comes to overdevelopment and environmental problems, a more negative trend is seen in the cities (50%) than in the suburbs (31%).

These data provide a window on Americans’ housing preferences and their perceptions of cities and suburbs. To fully understand Americans’ attitudes and behaviors related to housing decisions, we must examine the values underlying the attitudes expressed in these public opinion data.

⁵ Fannie Mae National Housing Survey; N = 1,652, April 1997.

IV. Analysis of focus groups

A. Values and attitudes that underlie housing decisions

1. Core value groups which drive attitudes and behaviors

Values are those fundamental beliefs held by all that form the basis for views and behaviors. Understanding values and how they impact the formation of attitudes is key to shaping effective communications on issues.

Therefore, our research on sprawl began by uncovering the values behind the decisions that Americans make about where they want to live. Three main values groups emerge from the discussions as the foundation for attitudes on housing:

- 1) Responsibility to one's family and oneself, which is expressed primarily as the desire for security and a quality of life that includes good schools, and clean, uncongested communities with green space nearby. For many, the responsibility to family also covers providing a sense of community. Residents of California and of the Atlanta area in our groups are the most likely to place a high importance on living in a less congested area.
- 2) Freedom, which Americans describe in terms of valuing individuality, privacy, and freedom to express oneself and to choose how one wants to live -- in an apartment, in the city, or in a house on three acres. For some, this includes living in a diverse community.
- 3) Love of nature, which is an appreciation for nature and natural beauty. This value motivates decisions on housing in different ways. While some Americans in our focus groups want to live near nature, others appreciate the value of protecting

nature that is not near them. Many say they want to protect natural habitats as well as have green space and wildlife to experience these things in their lives.

Although many see nature merely as deer or squirrels or birds in their backyards, others make connections of how nature is being lost to development. Residents in Boise, South Florida, and California are more likely than others in our groups to have a fuller sense of the importance of natural habitats broadly in their communities and their regional areas. These residents often describe special places they value in their areas, such as protecting the foothills outside of Boise, or the San Bruno Mountains in the San Francisco Bay area, or the Everglades in Florida.

Responsibility to one's family and oneself

I live in Van Nuys which usually people would think it's a terrible place to live, but we live in an old fashioned community. Our streets are tree lined. Everyone walks their dogs at eight o'clock at night. A lot of elderly people have lived in the area for 30 years. There's lots of kids. My daughter can play out front with the neighborhood kids while I'm cooking dinner inside. We're in the middle of Van Nuys. We know our neighbors. We have an old fashioned community feeling. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

I would like a safe environment for kids, and maybe something bigger and better schools. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

Where I live, the park is right across the street. Everything is close by but I can't let my kids go across the street. The area is bad -- drug abuse and things like that. You really have to watch where you live. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

I'd like less congestion, quiet, more open areas around that you can feel that you can get out and walk in your neighborhood and cross the street into the shopping center. Not a lot of cars and buses and trucks and all of that. Just open spaces. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

This place is getting too congested and too many people moving here. It is crazy. You cannot find any room for yourself. -- *male South San Francisco renter*

Freedom

I like it private, quiet, and lots of trees and plants. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

I want a single family neighborhood where we could have some space. The houses are too close together now. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

I don't want to live in the town area because it's too crowded. It's too loud. I'd rather live out in the country and have my own place out on a couple of acres of land with a house, a pool, and a nice lawn. I would also want some woods where I can do my own thing like hunt and fish. -- *male Waldorf renter*

My community is fine, I just wish that I had more land and space. -- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

Space gives you the sense of privacy that you don't have if your window is 10 feet from somebody else's window. -- *male Traverse City homeowner*

I would like to not be so cluttered, not so many homes around me. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

I cannot drive home one day and not hit traffic. There is probably no perfect place, but if I could find a place that had all those things and it was still a bit quieter, maybe a little more distances between the houses and a little bit more privacy. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

I've lived in a community where everybody was the same. I was a professional. Everybody around me was a professional. Everyone of us was either a geologist or geophysicist, or something in the sciences. It was very boring. All anybody could talk about was oil prices. "What are we going to drill?" I like to duck hunt. and all these guys, for some reason, none of them wanted to do or talk about any of that. I like a different community. -- *male Waldorf renter*

Diversity is where it is at and you've got to be there and mix it up. You don't want children growing up prejudiced of areas saying this is an all white area or this is a Mexican area. You want them all to grow up together. People are just people, just a different color. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

Love of nature

It is nice to have natural areas and wildlife right around the corner. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

Wildlife is important to me. I care very much because you can't get it back. Once you lose your wildlife areas, you can't get it back. -- *female Boise homeowner*

2. Choices about housing and community

In the focus groups we offered people a choice of two types of communities in which to live -- one a new sprawl development and another which could be a new or an older neighborhood with houses closer together and without the characteristics of sprawl. (See Appendix for descriptions.)

In nearly every group there were some residents who would choose to live in a sprawl community and some who would choose the alternative, closer to the city. Overall, the sprawl option tends to be somewhat more popular than the non-sprawl option because people are drawn more to the qualities of space and privacy than to convenience and community. Homeowners and renters generally express similar preferences. The Atlanta group of African-American homeowners was the only group which unanimously chose the

sprawl option, while the California groups were more likely to choose the non-sprawl house because for many of the Californians, living on a lot of one-quarter to one acre, far from the city, is no longer a realistic option.

a. The value of sprawl development

Those focus group participants who choose the sprawl-type development are driven by the quest for privacy, space, freedom to move out from the congested center, and love of nature. These people care less about the size of the house than about the distance between themselves and their neighbors. They believe sprawl developments get them closer to nature because they see squirrels and deer in their backyards. They worship a big yard and space for kids to play, and they are willing to make the trade-off of increased driving to stores and work for more privacy at home. They also value living among people of similar backgrounds and income levels.

Wide streets are generally not a problem to these residents, nor is the absence of public transportation, since they live automobile-dominated existences. Some sprawl-choosers are unconcerned that schools are not close, since they would not let their children ride bikes to school even if the school was a few blocks away because of the fear of crime.

The words they use to describe the sprawl development include: private, in the country, near nature, peaceful, similar houses, quiet, upper middle class.

Privacy is the most important. I don't like the way the houses are built these days right next to each other. If I had my choice, I want a spacious yard and a large house. The lack of convenience doesn't really bother me. -- *female Boise renter*

I like the privacy. There's a trade-off between being too far away from your neighbors or being too close, but I'd rather err on being too far away from them. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

I like the privacy of Lot A. I like to go out and spend some time in the woods. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

We sacrificed convenience because we really like being out, away. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

I would like to move out and have a little more space and room to be myself a bit more and not be so super crowded in with anybody. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

I circled larger lots, land far from the city, and big spacious yard. That is what drove me. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

Boise sits right on foothills. You can go up there and get yourself some land. It's kind of expensive, but you get some land. Put a nice big house on it. Nobody's around you. -- *male Boise renter*

In this day and age, I just don't feel comfortable enough to send my kid down the street on his bike to school. We transport our children to school. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

I would like to get [the buses] off the road, especially the metro buses. -- *male Waldorf renter*

b. The value of non-sprawl housing

For those who choose the home closer to the city, an appreciation for being close to urban conveniences -- stores, work, and recreation and cultural activities -- played most prominently in their decision. These non-sprawl choosers often are younger people and older people who are thinking about retirement and want to be close to the city for its amenities.

These participants also value a sense of community that comes from being close to your neighbors and living in a community of people of different backgrounds. Unlike some who choose the sprawl development, these residents value close proximity to schools and would welcome their children riding bikes to school. Many also consider the need to preserve farmland and other natural areas that are home to wildlife beyond their own backyards.

The words they use to describe the non-sprawl option include: urban, close to things, know your neighbors, in town, accessible, convenient, and community.

Convenience and sense of community

If I want to get a pizza, a video, or run to the store, everything is like five minutes. I would miss being able to do those kinds of things out in the country. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

I wouldn't want to drive 30 minutes to my job. I wouldn't want to live out in the boonies and have to drive. I like to be around a place where it doesn't take me a half an hour to get to a grocery store to get milk. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

The convenience was really the number one thing. I like less time to work. I don't like to waste time on the road. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

I circled less time to get to work, close to urban town, and children can ride their bikes. I don't think I want my son to grow up in the country because he would always seem like an only child with no friends around to play with. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

My children can walk to school. My children can walk to the beach, their friends are near by. I feel that is most convenient. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

I like the fact that [Lot B] was close to an urban area or small town, and the farmland and natural areas are preserved. It is something that I appreciate about the area right now. -- *male South San Francisco renter*

I would like a diverse community. I work downtown and there is every range of person you can imagine in your daily rounds. I like that kind of community. -- *male Atlanta homeowner*

Preserving nature

I like the fact that it takes less time to get to work because you spend so much time going back to work. I also like farmland and nature areas that are home to wildlife and countryside being preserved. I like the fact that there's an area that they're still going to keep wild. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

I'm close to the foothills. I wish they would stop building in the foothills and leave it alone. It's getting to the point now where you can't see them. There's too much building going on up there. It's dangerous. It just erodes away our foothills. -- *male Boise renter*

The thing that really swayed me was the farmland and the natural areas that are home to wildlife. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

Farmland and other natural areas that are home to the wildlife in the countryside is very good because the trees and other things are good for the air. It cleans the air. Also, wildlife is very important. It's something our children and generations to come are going to need. If they keep on knocking everything down, we're not going to have anything. -- *female Waldorf homeowner*

The first one I circled was the farmland and other natural areas that are home to wildlife and countryside are preserved. I grew up on the Old Michigan Peninsula, and it's going to be erased. I mean, the suburbs are moving out there so quickly, there won't be any land left. And the farmers are being pushed out. My parents own a farm, and it's really hard. -- *female Traverse City renter*

3. Common reactions to housing characteristics

Those who select the sprawl development and those who choose the non-sprawl development share common reactions to many housing characteristics presented in the focus groups, such as sidewalks, narrow streets, big yards, bus service, light rail, and town squares.

- Sidewalks are widely sought-after by our focus group participants. Sidewalks are synonymous with safety, community, and the appealing idea of walking in your community.

- Narrow streets as a label is not popular in the groups. When people hear the term narrow streets, they do not think of through streets that make traffic flow easier but rather of blocked cars, traffic, and no place to park.
- Big yards are valued by most residents in the groups, even many of those who choose the non-sprawl option, because of the desire for space and privacy. The exceptions are older, empty-nesters, whose children are grown and who are not interested in taking care of a lawn.
- Proximity to bus service is a negative rather than a positive to most of our suburban participants, because very few of the residents had good things to say about buses. This form of transportation is often seen as unreliable, unsafe, noisy, dirty, and inconvenient. Our Southern California and San Francisco Bay area residents are exceptions to this negative view. These Californians tell us they do not use the buses themselves, but they definitely want them nearby just in case the need arises. The Californians express a greater sense of importance than others for the need for improved mass transit to alleviate traffic in the future.
- Light rail is more popular than buses among the residents in our groups. In particular, suburbanites in the Atlanta area and Charles County, MD join with Californians favoring light rail in their communities. In other areas, light rail is less popular because people cannot see the need for it in their lives.
- The concept of a town square is not readily comprehended by the residents in our discussions. While some people in each group believe a development with a town square implies a green space surrounded by shops and a post office and city hall, most are at least initially confused by the term. Participants have vague impressions of a type of living that occurred in communities a long time ago, and therefore is somewhat anachronistic. It is not instantly popular and needs explanation. Once “town square” is explained, more people become interested in the idea, but since it does not comport with their current sense of what they need in a community, opinions remain mixed.

4. Appeal of diverse communities

Living in a diverse community is appealing for some and unappealing for others. Many of the participants in our groups, particularly California Latinos and San Francisco Bay area residents, express a strong interest in wanting to live in a community with many different types of people. They see much value in experiencing different cultures and ways of living, and some express a desire to raise their children among a diverse mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. The participants in Grand Rapids were the least likely to see benefits to living in a diverse community.

However, living in a community with people of different income levels is often unappealing, because some people worry about crime and lower property values if they live with people who make less money than they do. Some also worry about not being accepted socially if they live in a community with people who make more money than they do.

Appeal of diversity

I liked the diverse community with people from different backgrounds like that. It makes life interesting. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

I think diversity makes it interesting. If you are all similar in background, you do not see how other people live. -- *female South San Francisco renter*

I like diversity with some apartments, some houses, and different kinds of people. To have everyone in the community with the same background and income level would be boring. -- *female Boise renter*

I grew up around a university type of town, so there was diversity. You have people come from all over the world. I'm used to different ethnic backgrounds. Because of it being a college town, they still had a certain class level. Then you have diversity of people with income levels that are only able to rent and they're not stable. They are transient in a different kind of a way. -- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

Same income levels

It has got to do with economic levels. If everybody is on the same economic level, I don't care if you are black, white, or Asian. They are all the same. You do the same things. You just might come from different backgrounds and religions. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

If you are looking at your place to live as an investment, you are looking at communities where income levels are equal. To build equity, everybody is going to maintain their houses in the same manner more or less based on income levels. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

I saw community of people with similar backgrounds and this diverse community on the other one. It seemed like a negative. I bought a house and people of similar values were my neighbors. Circumstances changed and now they're rentals. People come and go and they don't share my values and my standards. This is not as good of a neighborhood for me anymore. People want to live with people that share their values. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

Lack of appeal for diversity

I'm happy being an American where I live and being a city person. I don't care for that different culture, different background, or different income level. With the different income level, you see too much competition and too many people trying to show off. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

I work with diverse people all day long. I want to live by people that are similar to me. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

B. Sprawl development -- what does it mean and what are its implications for the future

1. The word sprawl is negative but causes some confusion

The word sprawl generally evokes negative images, such as traffic, congestion, concrete, pollution, ugly housing subdivisions, and strip malls. The residents in our groups often link the word with these consequences of sprawl and believe it is something that should be avoided -- but not always. In fact, some see benefits to sprawl.

As a label, the word sprawl is somewhat problematic because it means conflicting things to many of the people in our groups. The most common view is that sprawl is uncontrolled development that is spread out and ugly. But to some others, especially in California, Atlanta, and Grand Rapids, sprawl means a way out of current congestion, the ability to spread out, to move to a quiet, peaceful area, and economic growth. It provides choices of affordable housing and gives people space.

To many others, it means congestion itself, overcrowding, traffic, and high density housing. To still others, sprawl is a combination of these concepts: spread out congestion caused by rapid, unplanned growth. And, a few others are unable to define sprawl at all.

The most common link to sprawl heard across most of the groups is the concept of unplanned suburban development. The sense that sprawl is bad because it is unplanned is powerful, as is the sense that although it spreads, it also causes congestion.

Focus group participants in Southern California and the San Francisco Bay area, who mostly live in post-sprawl communities, are somewhat more likely to hold conflicting and ambiguous views of sprawl than are residents living in communities just beginning to experience sprawl.

Many participants see signs of sprawl in high rise buildings, overcrowding, traffic, smog and construction. To others, these signs are indications that sprawl is not happening enough -- that if we had more sprawl there would be less congestion.

Negative images of sprawl

Sprawl is what 98 percent cement whether it is a road, sidewalk, house, or building. There are not many trees and very few parks. Most of it is parking lots and roadways. So, I see it as a big negative. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

Urban sprawl is communities just popping up here and there. It's a lot of developing happening very quickly. -- *female Boise renter*

[Sprawl] eats up farmland and it is not well thought out. -- *male Boise homeowner*

Sprawl is ugly growth. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

I think of sprawl like my child sleeping on the couch. I think of it as one little thing taking up a lot of room. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

Congested and poor planning. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

Sprawl is more like take a cannon and just throw it out there. Like you're playing Yatzee and you're just throwing it out there and it's just there. -- *male Modesto renter*

[It gives you options] but at the same time you have got to think that sprawl brings traffic, congestion, and overcrowding. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

I think of sprawl as just having land gobbled up by development. And whether that's high density or low density development or whatever it is, I just think of it as a city putting out it's tentacles and taking more and more natural land and bringing it into a suburban mode more or less where it's not open anymore. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

I think of traditional towns that start out small, they are not planned, and they just keep on growing and growing. That is sprawl to me. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

Sprawl is unplanned. It means that nobody thought about it. It just kind of happened. I think that's more negative, because usually things just happen. -- *female Waldorf renter*

Sprawl is sprawl. It is uncontrolled development with no plan. One case is suburbia and the other is urban but all of it is unplanned development. -- *male black Atlanta homeowner*

I think sprawl means big and out of control. It is just spilling over the edges. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

Benefits of sprawl

I think [sprawl] is good for economic growth. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

I think sprawl is the development of structures and homes. Whether it be up to two or three stories, or spread out, the people are still going to come. There's no way to limit more people, whether they're from another country or Oregon or Washington. You have to let the development go on. Otherwise, it's going to be even more crowded. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

[Sprawl] means more space. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

When I hear the word sprawl, I think of where I grew up which was more country and spread out where everybody had five or six acres. -- *female Waldorf renter*

I think sprawl is to prevent overcrowding. It keeps moving out. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

2. Suburban development can mean lack of individuality

Suburban development is a term that generates a mixed reaction from renters and homeowners in our groups, but opinions tend toward the negative. When the term suburban development is used by itself, without a reference to sprawl, the most common image they have is a negative one of "cookie cutter" housing subdivisions. Mostly, the suburban development label means monotonous subdivisions, cheap small houses that are built in a hurry too close together, without variety or planning for future expansion. Many residents expect these houses to be built in congested areas within a short driving distance to strip malls.

On the positive side, some residents point out that there is appealing suburban development with diverse housing styles of unattached houses along wide streets with broad lawns. Also, many feel that suburban development enables people to get away from the city's congestion by providing less expensive homes.

Californians in our groups are more likely than other residents to have a negative impression of suburban development, while the African-American homeowners in Atlanta tend to have more positive views.

Overall, while suburban development offers hope to escape congestion, many believe it can come at a high cost -- loss of individuality.

Negatives of suburban development

Cookie factory with cookie cutter houses. -- *male Waldorf renter*

They just plow an area and put in a bunch of tract homes. -- *male South San Francisco renter*

When you say suburban development, I picture rows and rows of houses. They have built up whole new tracts -- squares just filled with rows of houses. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

It is just uniform. It is almost like military housing -- one thing after another. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

Positives of suburban development

I am thinking each house has more land -- you might get an acre or acre and quarter. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

[Suburban development] has more of a planned sound to me. Sprawl just seems like it is creeping along -- creeping and creeping. -- *female Waldorf renter*

Suburban development is probably more controlled. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

Neutral reactions

If you go up north, you just see mile after mile of new subdivisions. To me, that is suburban development. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

The term [suburban development] describes single family tract homes being produced in mass production close to the city yet far enough away where it would still be a little less populated. -- *female South San Francisco Latina renter*

3. Other terms

a. Good planning is a solution people seek, rather than better land use

Good planning. Since sprawl is most often defined as uncontrolled or unplanned development, the antidote to sprawl in the minds of our participants is better planning. The concept of better planning of development was raised spontaneously across the groups as the answer to sprawl. These residents believe it is the responsibility of a number of groups, from builders to zoning boards to local elected officials, to use better planning to combat the negative consequences of sprawl.

In some groups, we asked participants what would constitute “good planning,” and their responses focus on providing more parks and open space for recreation. Participants often express the need to protect green spaces in nature.

I think proper planning also depends on planning in green spaces. -- *female South San Francisco homeowner*

[Good planning means] more neighborhood parks, more open spaces, and more trees. -- *male Modesto renter*

[Good planning means] state parks and more recreation for kids. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

Community service park or something like that. That would be good. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

We need more parks and open spaces. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

When a developer comes in and mows down every tree in sight. I find that obscene. They don't dare leave a tree up. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

One of the biggest issues is especially around here is using incredibly fertile farmland to build another housing tract. When, in the same community, there is some really crummy land that you couldn't grow weeds on -- why not build houses there? -- *male Modesto homeowner*

Better land use. The term "better land use" is not a clear or positive term for many people in our groups. When some in our groups hear "better land use," it sounds like a politician is trying to do something that they will regret. It is vague, yet ominous sounding.

In some of the California and Michigan groups, where we spent more time than in other locations on this topic, better land use generally means "getting the most efficient use out of the land" by building houses closer together to preserve larger tracts of land for open space. There is an acknowledgment that this is what better land use means but not necessarily what these participants want.

In the farm community of Modesto, participants believe better land use means building houses on farmland that is not productive, and giving industry access to highways.

Condominiums come to mind because you can stack them in a small space -- that is using the land wiser. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

Using a little more logic when you are trying to build or plan for the future. -- *male Traverse City renter*

It is not these big, huge homes that are built for a lot of money. -- *female Traverse City renter*

[Better land use] means building houses closer together. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

It is more efficient to put more people on smaller spaces and then have a green belt. I said efficient. I didn't say it was wonderful. -- *female South San Francisco homeowner*

It is more efficient to put more people on less land and have more green space. --
female South San Francisco homeowner

[Better land use] is having more people in a smaller area. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

If you are building houses on good farmland, I don't think that's good land use planning. But if there is some not so good farmland close by, that is where you should build your houses. That would be good planning. -- *male Modesto homeowner*

In order to bring industry in and jobs into an area, I think that you need to have access to the freeways. -- *male Modesto homeowner*

b. Cluster development and mixed-use development as problematic labels

The terms cluster development and mixed-use development are largely unknown to people in the focus groups, but meet with negative reactions. In a brief discussion which elicited only initial reactions from participants, both these terms were not appealing labels and needed to be explained.

Cluster development is an unfamiliar term to most people in the focus groups, but is generally taken to mean houses that are crowded together. This is not an appealing concept to the many who value space. Even those who value a more closely knit community do not warm to the idea of living in a "cluster" of houses. It sounds like apartments and condominiums, which people in our focus groups widely want to avoid.

Proposing cluster development is like asking these participants to live in a cramped and crowded environment. A few participants who are familiar with good examples of clustered development which preserves open public green spaces hold positive opinions about cluster development.

[Cluster development] sounds frightening. -- *female Boise renter*

Cluster development brings to mind claustrophobic. -- *female Boise homeowner*

Houses that are really close together. -- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

Clustered development is like the row houses in Baltimore. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

Houses built clustered together on open land with some land around it for community use. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

Cluster development in this county is when a property is zoned to house so many units, in order to have some green space, the zoning department will allow clustering so that you can group your units, your houses together and then hopefully you'll be here and you have that little lake, and some sidewalks and some green area. Clusters are to allow for buffers of green area. -- *female Waldorf renter*

The term mixed-use development makes people in the groups fear they will be living next door to large factories, commercial office buildings, or convenience stores. Many see mixed-use development directly threatening those things they value most in housing -- privacy and space.

I don't have any desire to live in that kind of area. It is too combined. I like the space and privacy. I don't want to be by somebody. I don't want to be by things. -- *male Boise renter*

Commercial and residential together. We don't want manufacturing anywhere close to the community. I don't want it interfering with family life right up against my fence. -- *male Boise homeowner*

You could have a seven-eleven next door. It is very negative. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

It is a zoning issue. The problem down here is that there never was zoning until it was too late so I live right across the street from a commercial building. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

c. Neo-traditional development may not be inviting

The term neo-traditional housing development is largely unknown to people. The use of the prefix "neo" confuses people and makes them skeptical that someone is trying to sell them something they do not want. Simply referring to "traditional housing" or "traditional development" is less offensive but still unclear, since most of the participants do not have a firm definition of traditional housing.

For some in the groups, traditional housing is a sprawl development house on one acre with wide streets and no sidewalks, while for others it is a small house with a front porch on a narrow street. Many in our groups think they cannot or do not want to go back to that kind of housing in which they grew up. Many others think a closer knit, traditional community would be appealing. But simply saying "traditional development" says different things to different people.

Unattached single family homes. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

It sounds like a planned community. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

It sounds like Disney World. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

Victorian house. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

Colonial-type house. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

A neo-traditional house would probably be to me a small piece of property with as many houses as a builder could cram into a lot. A subdivision that is very overbuilt. They wouldn't be big homes or big lots. -- *female Boise renter*

4. Support for controlling sprawl

Although our focus group participants are quick to recognize some of the consequences of sprawl, they are reluctant to believe it can be avoided. Attitudes about sprawl are grounded in the belief that it is a natural phenomenon, as irrepressible as the rising of the sun each morning or the ebb and flow of the tides. People will always seek to spread out, to be free, to escape congestion and have more space. Consequently, the residents in our groups have difficulty thinking we can stop sprawl, or that we should even try. As one woman in Grand Rapids told us, saying you should stop sprawl is almost like telling a child not to grow up.

Our participants see sprawl happening in their communities, and most would like to avoid its negative impacts. But to many people, sprawl also equals economic growth and progress; it provides choice and fosters the value of personal freedom; it means affordable housing that is unavailable close to the city; and it is a way to get closer to nature, at least for awhile until you have to sprawl again. There is a sense that there is nothing the individual can or should do to *stop* sprawl. They do not know how they would go about trying to stop it and they worry it would limit their choices.

[Trying to stop sprawl] is almost like telling a child not to grow up. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

You can't stop it. It would be nice if you could control it, but you won't be able to stop it. -- *female Waldorf homeowner*

I don't think we are going to be able to stop it but it would be nice if it was planned in a way that would preserve why we all love to live here. -- *female Traverse City renter*

It is something they just don't have control over. -- *male Waldorf renter*

I wouldn't want to stop growth but I see sprawl in my mind as not well planned. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

We cannot stop sprawl but we can regulated and coordinate it so it is systematically developed. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

You can try and control the spread of the sprawl but it is too late to do much else about it. -- *female Traverse City renter*

There is a need for it. The population is increasing and people need to live somewhere.
-- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

When I'm thinking the word sprawl, it means spreading, growing, building, and moving out, but I don't think that's so negative. For instance, in San Francisco, people can't afford to live there anymore, because it's too expensive, so they have to sprawl. They have to live in the suburbs, so I think it's a good thing. Where are people going to live? I don't know if Modesto will ever get that way, because it's not like a huge, big city.
-- *female Modesto renter*

You're going to have a certain amount of sprawl. The planet is only so big so you've got to use what you have. It's either going to go up or you're going to go out. -- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

While most of our residents are not ready to stop sprawl, they agree that it should be controlled. Those who feel this way present several indictments against sprawl: it is dirty, ugly, crowded, monotonous because of cookie cutter housing subdivisions, it increases their drive time daily because of traffic and congestion, and it harms the environment by destroying habitats for wildlife. Many residents also fear the loss of permanency or certainty due to sprawl. In Florida and other places, we heard residents lament that because of sprawl, their dream communities may become congested nightmares, and if they moved they might need to move again in five years.

Those homeowners and renters who have more of an appreciation for nature and habitat and open space tend to have a much stronger sense of self-interest in preventing sprawl than do other residents. The participants in Boise are concerned that sprawl is threatening the beauty and recreational value of the foothills outside the city, South Floridians worry about the Everglades, some Traverse City residents worry about spoiling Lake Michigan, and Californians want to protect their open space.

[Sprawl] certainly lowers the quality of life when things get overcrowded. Services get overcrowded, people fighting for services, water, garbage, and sewage prices go up. Roadways, sitting on the freeways, commuting forever, and no decent public transportation. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

All my friends who live in the suburbs, they're all crying now. They've been there 15 or 18 years and they feel like they should have stayed in their old neighborhood, because it's the same in the suburbs as it was in the city. So, it's all become one giant thing now. I think you really have to go far out to get what we think of as, or what we used to think of as a suburb. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

In the areas where it is taking away from our natural country and wildlife then it should be regulated. -- *male Boise renter*

I think it should be controlled and planned. It bothers me to see the foothills going away. Boise is a beautiful place to live and it is sad to see that going away. -- *male Boise renter*

The responsibility for sprawl is seen as shared among homeowners, renters, developers, politicians, and city planners, according to the Californians in our groups. Sprawl is seen as people exercising their free will to gain some space, and more negatively as the result of developers trying to make money, and politicians and city planners failing to take into account environmental protections and traffic.

Responsible? People who want to make money. -- *female Boise renter*

Untrained people that get into office and make decisions for people. -- *male Traverse City homeowner*

We are all responsible because we don't exercise our voice enough to representatives. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

Many of our participants see some limits to sprawl because of a finite amount of land on which to build, or a limited amount of water. Residents in our focus groups who could cite natural boundaries or resource restrictions were more likely than others to say growth and development has limits. For example, in South Florida, Boise, and California, residents are aware of the lack of water resources as a natural limit, and many others see a limited amount of land on which to build. However, not everyone sees these limits.

It is limited right now to the amount of water we can produce to keep these people alive. -- *male Boise homeowner*

Water is a big problem. We think there is a lot of it but there isn't. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

I think the limiting factor here is the water. This is a desert actually, and all our water is brought in through pipes and aqueducts. And so we could reach a point if they don't continue to expand that system or do desalination or something like that, we're going to run out of water. Then that will put the limit on growth. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

There is a water problem. They have always got us rationing the water. More people, more houses [means] more water and more utilities. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

Where are we going to build? In the Everglades? -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

There is a limit only depending on who owns the property. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

There is a limit to what we might *want* to do, but there is no natural limit here.
-- *female Atlanta homeowner*

I think there should be certain areas that are off limits, like the foothills, any more development over there, but I don't think we should try to stop it all. To me it's progress. This place is going to get bigger. It's going to happen and I don't mind living in a bigger city.
-- *male Boise renter*

C. Arguments for controlling sprawl: Why should I care?

In the course of the focus groups, participants were presented with numerous arguments in favor of controlling sprawl in their areas. The basic thrust of each message remained the same across the nine communities we visited, but specific facts were inserted into the arguments where appropriate to localize them. Their reactions shed light on the reasons why people across the country would care about controlling sprawl, the intensity of support for arguments, as well as the problems and advantages of each argument.

1. Prevent pollution and flooding

As pavement covers open spaces and destroys natural habitats, such as wetlands and forests, we lose the essential services that these ecosystems provide, such as filtering our air and water and preventing floods.

For example, when roads, parking lots, driveways, and sidewalks are added to the landscape, millions of gallons of rainwater run into our storm drains instead of being absorbed by vegetation and the soil. This can cause flooding.

A parking lot generates 10 to 20 times more runoff than a meadow. Runoff can cause erosion and carries pollutants such as oil and lawn chemicals directly into rivers, lakes, and coastal waters which pollutes our water supply.

An argument that warns of increased pollution and flooding when natural habitats are destroyed increases the saliency of sprawl for most of the focus group participants. The values of responsibility to family, to oneself and to the earth are driving these residents' concerns for controlling sprawl in order to prevent pollution and protect their health. The power of this argument is the direct effect people see sprawl having on their lives.

The explanation that pavement causes more run-off which in turn creates more pollution is understandable and compelling to many residents who raise the issue of water pollution throughout the groups. They find the direct link between loss of habitat and pollution credible.

This argument is persuasive across most of the groups, but is somewhat less persuasive to the Modesto homeowners, who feel they do not suffer from pollution or flooding, and many do not believe you can stop progress (pavement) for the environment.

We've covered up enough wetlands that we should all be sent to prison. The fact is we're now finding out that wetlands scrub water and do a far better job of keeping our aquifers clean and rivers clean than we do with our processing plants. -- *male Boise homeowner*

I'm a biologist for the state of Florida. I've seen it happen to the Indian River where runoff from highways is now being treated before the water makes it into the Indian River lagoon. It is incredible the amount of sediment that these trap along with other debris that would normally get flushed into and end up silting over grass flats. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

It is a big issue. It is runoff off from parking lots and chicken farms where chicken feces is being dumped into the river. -- *male Waldorf homeowner*

This is more compelling than the birds and wildlife. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

If we pollute it up so bad and you don't have the air, what are you going to breath? What are you going to eat because you polluted everything. -- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

I'm a parent of a child who's autistic, and they don't know what causes it. I can say that I know other people -- they live close to me -- one child was hydrocephalus, and has severe retardation. I know two people that live within two miles from me who ended up losing their children to chromosomal problems. I'm very convinced -- after researching a lot of things that I have researched -- that it's environmental. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

I looked at the stuff as being washed down the drain into our rivers, lakes and ocean. We can't even go swimming, because it's contaminated where the drainage comes from the city. It might be shut down for two or three or four days until you can go back. Then they open it up and is it still safe to go back in? Our waters are getting contaminated. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

It's kind of like a catch-22 because as people, those are things that we need for our convenience and for practicality. But for the environment, it's not a good thing. -- *female Modesto renter*

2. Save our natural habitats

Sprawl is eliminating natural habitats for birds and wildlife, causing their numbers to decline. The more we expand development, the less nature and open space we have to enjoy. In order to protect these natural habitats for wildlife, we have to protect land from development.

Loss of habitats for birds and wildlife and a loss of open space due to sprawl is of broad concern to participants in the focus groups, but strength of feelings varies from group to group. Some residents are motivated to protect habitats for birds and wildlife for the human appreciation of these species; other residents place a higher value on protecting natural areas and open spaces that humans enjoy.

This sentiment to protect natural areas for human appreciation is heard most strongly in areas where the residents can most easily cite examples of places in nature nearby that they believe may be threatened by development: the foothills of Boise, the Everglades of South Florida, the San Bruno Mountains in the Bay area. The participants in those areas strongly support protecting natural areas from development for their own enjoyment and for their children's sake. They look to the future and they see value in preserving habitats and wildlife for their beauty and because it is the "right thing to do."

Many in the groups express this value in something other than absolute terms, calling for a balance between protecting habitats and the need for housing. The participants who are less environmentally motivated tend to believe that people come before wildlife and that we have enough natural habitats.

Appreciation of natural areas

I am very interested in the foothills and nature. I want to be able to enjoy it. -- *female Boise homeowner*

It gives the value to life to children for them to be able to grow up and know that there is something out there to protect. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

I want my grandchildren to see birds and the kind of animals I'm seeing. If they keep going the way they are, there are going to be so many extinct animals. My grandchildren won't be able to enjoy it. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

About 15 years ago, I was on a San Bruno Mountain [campaign]. They had a campaign, and I felt like we saved the mountain. Now, I think it is just a matter of time. There is developments creeping up on San Bruno Mountain now. -- *male South San Francisco renter*

I want to be able to go outside and see nature. I want to be able to appreciate these things. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

I would rather have my kids see wildlife than to have to be stuck in a glop of 700 people. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

Protect wildlife and their habitats

If you don't stop developing, then all the animals are going to die. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

You can see the marshes we are losing and that is natural habitat for birds. -- *male Waldorf renter*

As more animals become extinct, you ruin the balance of nature. -- *female Grand Rapids homeowner*

It is a chain. You cannot just do away with certain animals, and not affect other animals. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

A lot of times when these developers make environmental impact studies -- you know their idea is to remove the existing wildlife from their area that they're going to destroy. "We'll build a place for them where they can have refuge," but then you have to move them all and that's just not natural. Wildlife is already there. Let them stay there. It's their place. -- *male Van Nuys renter*

Need for balance

The thing is there has to be a balance in terms of what you want to maintain for wildlife and the natural habitat. We're growing and developing. You're going to have to make some sacrifices. I don't think it should go down to zero, but some balance. -- *male black Atlanta homeowner*

I would say that we should try to protect land, but we can't protect all of the land all of the time or else there's not place to develop. We need to be careful with it, but not in the extreme that we have to totally stop development to protect the wildlife. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

Somebody will come up and say, "Well we can't use this land, because there's a worm that is going to be obsolete." Maybe there are two worms in the world and yet we are preventing things from happening. We can have habitat, birds and animals, but I'm not convinced that we have to protect all this land from development. I think better planning would make it better. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

I'm conflicted on this because I enjoy going to the mountains and these natural places and seeing these things. I want my children and grandchildren to see it, but sometimes I think people put the importance of animals and their convenience above people. -- *male Van Nuys homeowner*

In Modesto, it's not even relevant. We don't have a habitat problem that I know of. We don't have any species of animals that we're losing. If I lived in Tahoe or I lived in someplace else, it might be a larger issue but it is not an issue. I don't know anybody that's using that one to stop growth. -- *male Modesto homeowner*

3. Sprawl is costing taxpayers money

Suburban housing development that is spread out costs all taxpayers more money because it is much more costly to provide public services such as roads, sewers, schools and other facilities for communities that are spread apart than ones that are closer together. These costs are not reflected in the prices of these new suburban homes, but rather passed on to all residents of the area in the form of higher taxes.

The value of fairness comes strongly into play when participants react to the argument that sprawl's high infrastructure costs are burdening homeowners who do not live in sprawl communities. Reactions to this tax cost argument are mixed across nearly all groups. While some focus group participants believe that fairness dictates that people who purchase homes in new developments should be forced to pay the full infrastructure costs for those new developments, many others believe these costs should be shared by all homeowners since the whole community benefits from new development.

The cost of sprawl argument becomes muddled for all sides by contending that the taxes imposed on new communities generally are not covering the full costs of infrastructure. Many participants believe these costs are already covered by developers' impact fees (which these residents support) and taxes. In addition, people in the groups have differing views of local taxes, who pays for what, and whether developers and homeowners already pay for these costs. When an earlier version of the argument used the term "subsidizes" to describe the increased cost of sprawl to current homeowners and taxpayers, participants became even more confused. However, if it is boiled down to a fairness argument, it may be more persuasive. The cost of sprawl argument may be very effective when it is made locally so that residents can easily understand the connections between their local taxes and development. However, it is less persuasive as a general argument.

Many participants feel that houses would not be affordable if all the costs were included in the price or in higher property taxes for new homeowners, and they believe the whole community benefits when new residents move in. These participants need to be convinced that the new housing itself is not advantageous, before they would care about the cost.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is little difference of opinion between homeowners and renters in the groups on this cost-of-sprawl argument, even though renters are seeking to purchase new development housing.

To the extent that sprawl is seen as a natural progression and positive growth, people accept sharing; but when sprawl is seen as disruptive, polluting, and ugly, residents are more likely to want to raise the price of new homes to make developers and homebuyers shoulder more of the burden. The task ahead in making the tax argument is two fold: 1) focus on a simple message of fairness; and 2) illustrate that new sprawl development housing is not advantageous to communities.

Cost goes to new homeowner

People who are buying these new developments should also be paying to put in the sewers and to build the schools. The developers just shouldn't be able to keep building houses with no infrastructure. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

I think new communities should pay some additional money. It might not be the total amount, but some additional money. It's no longer a free ride like it used to be 10 years ago. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

I think the people in those homes should pay for the maintenance of the roads, the fire department, the police department. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

I believe people should pay for their own mess and to me that is what this is -- a mess. -- *male Waldorf renter*

I don't feel that if I'm living in a cul de sac that's all new, somebody else should be paying. The people in the cul de sac should pay for it. It's their new home. It is their area. You guys pay for it. I don't feel that six blocks down they should have to pay for something you're getting new if they've already done it. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

Share the cost

It should be shared because it's not just those people who bought those new houses who are going to benefit from the new schools and those types of things. It's everybody in that community or subdivision that's going to benefit from this. -- *male Boise renter*

If you factored in all the costs, nobody could afford the houses. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

We should allow a person the opportunity to buy a house for the same cost you paid for when you were probably struggling just to own a home. Taxing a person extra just because he comes along later than you is unfair. -- *male black Atlanta homeowner*

It should be shared within the community because all the homes that are built -- all the older homes that are built around the new development are going to benefit as far as property values. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

4. Developers do not consider the cost or impact on the local environment

Developers are buying undeveloped land cheaply and building new homes, shopping malls, and offices in areas which were once farmland and open space without taking into consideration the cost to taxpayers or the impact on the local environment of these developments.

An argument which blames developers for not considering the cost or impact of their developments on the local environment and community is most often an unpersuasive reason to control sprawl in our groups. Most participants believe that developers respond to what people want, and that developers are already forced to adhere to specific zoning requirements regarding infrastructure and the environment.

Many participants feel that developers are required to pay impact fees for services to new communities and to assure that their developments will not harm the environment. If the developers do not adhere to these plans, our residents tend to blame the zoning boards and local politicians who must hold them accountable. For the most part, developers are not expected to have an allegiance to anything but the profit margin.

Many participants, especially renters, do not agree that developers are buying land cheaply; instead, they think land is expensive, and developers are given credit for building affordable housing.

I don't think they're making houses affordable. My friend just got a house. You wouldn't believe the little bit of a house she got for what she paid. It was unbelievable. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

They don't buy land cheap. They buy it at whatever the market will bear. You are not in the business of losing money. You are there to make a profit. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

Developers only take into consideration what they are required to do. If they are not required, they don't have to have any rules or regulations. -- *male Traverse City homeowner*

I think to some extent the developers already have to develop by certain standards. I am not positive about this, but [there are] certain rules and regulations as far as the environment and other such things. -- *female South San Francisco renter*

I think impact fees are very important as far as building a new house. If you choose to live in a rural area and that puts an increased drain on the resources of that community, then you have a responsibility for that. -- *male Waldorf renter*

Developers don't care about that. It's the community, the city, and everybody who allows the developers to build. The city says go ahead and built that development over there. It doesn't matter. The city should have made sure that their plans included cost to the taxpayers and the impact on the local environment. That's not really the developer's concern. -- *male Modesto renter*

I think these days developers are under the gun of having to meet certain criteria from the city planners of having to have X percent set aside for whatever facilities that the city wants to require the developer to include in this development. Whereas it used to be just whatever they want to buy and put up, because they pay the money for the property. There's more restrictions now as to how free they are with their developments. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

Not all participants hold such benign views of developers. Some blame developers for building cookie-cutter housing subdivisions and ugly strip malls without taking into consideration the public's wishes. In Boise and Grand Rapids, we heard a great deal of homeowner mistrust of developers, and in Southern California residents expressed very negative feelings toward developers, but uncertainty about the public's ability to stop them.

It just makes me angry that a lot of times the big corporations come in here and they don't care about our quality of life. They care only about the business aspect of it. -- *female Boise homeowner*

They are putting ten houses on a lot instead of five houses so they can make more money. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

5. Save our farmlands

Sprawl is consuming farmland which is bad for agriculture and threatens rural communities. A recent study by the American Farmland Trust indicates that from 1982 to 1992, urban sprawl across America has consumed 4.3 million acres of prime farmland, which is about the size of the state of Rhode Island. That is almost 50 acres every hour of every day.

Saving farmland is generally a less than persuasive reason for stopping sprawl for most of the participants across our groups, with one clear exception: those in California. In most of the groups, even though many respondents have observed the loss of farmland in or near their own communities, they are not strongly sympathetic to farmland loss because they believe there are enough large tracks of farmland left that go unused. Many participants also believe that farming has become more efficient in recent years and we can obtain our food from fewer acres; the participants are generally unimpressed by the loss of 4.3 million acres of farmland. For sure, some in our groups express concern over the loss of a potential food source by losing farmland, but these participants are a minority voice.

However, participants are somewhat sympathetic to the idea that we are losing rural communities and losing open space. Attitudes about loss of farmland may differ by region and community, so while these findings identify the types of difficulties a farmlands argument faces, they are not a projectable sampling of attitudes in all locations across the United States.

It is something to be concerned about but I don't think it is necessarily a worry. You drive up the road a couple of hours and it is nothing but farmland as far as you can see.
-- male West Palm Beach homeowner

I don't think this is convincing. We have tons of land in this country. -- male Waldorf renter

Land is to serve the people. We are not short on farmland. -- male Traverse City homeowner

I am not totally convinced of that because there is a lot of farmland that is not being used right now. -- male Grand Rapids homeowner

The one thing that this statement fails to take into consideration is that farming and farm practices have become exponentially more productive since the middle of the century. -- male Traverse City renter

They have made enough agriculture improvements and found better ways to farm on smaller amounts of land. It think it will be okay. -- *male Boise renter*

You can do such intense farming on such a small property now. You really don't need a lot of land to farm. -- *male West Palm Beach homeowner*

The agriculture prices are going to go up, but our country produces a huge surplus at this point of agricultural products. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

The values and views of Californians diverge dramatically from those of participants in other places on the farmland issue. The idea that sprawl is threatening California's farmland is very disturbing to most participants across the groups because they view farmland as part of the state's identity and the backbone of its economy. To Californians, the argument appeals mostly to their value of wanting to protect the health and security of their families. These Californians are less concerned about saving farmland across the U.S. and more about saving their own state's farmland because it ensures income as well as a low-cost, reliable, and safe source of food for their families.

Their motivation is less a reverence for farmland or open space, but more the practical appeal of keeping an important California resource. They are also less worried that the loss of farmland "threatens rural communities," and more that it threatens California's economy and consumers.

These sentiments were heard in all three California locations, but the Modesto-area residents are more limited in their scope of which California farmlands need to be saved. These farm-area residents express the view that there is "good farmland" and "bad farmland," and it is perfectly okay to build housing developments in areas of unproductive farmland.

We have this fertile state of California and we produce all this produce. Yet, we see more and more coming from South America and Mexico where they use DDT which is not allowed in our country. Are we going to give our land away so somebody can live there at the expense of people's health because we are then going to be importing all this produce that we can't grow anymore? -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

The agriculture here is regulated for what they can spray and different things like that and start bringing from out of the country and who knows? You might be just getting something off an airplane. -- *male Modesto renter*

There are too many variables that are connected with it. If we are giving up on our farmland because we are importing things from other countries, then it is the wrong thing to do and we shouldn't let this happen. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

[Now] you can eat the fruit right away. You don't have to worry about washing them. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

It is not worth living in a spread out area if it is going to take away the farmland which you use for food, fruit, vegetables, and all that stuff. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

It is all basically an agriculturally-based economy...Still, the heart and soul is still going to be agriculture unless this trend [of eliminating farmland] continues. Then it won't be. I think that is what has to be protected. -- *male Modesto renter*

No way. This is California's economy. The strawberries, apples, cherries, peaches, and apricots. -- *San Francisco Latina renter*

Can I make a suggestion as to how this might be more convincing at least for me. Instead of raising it as being that it's bad and threatens rural communities, for me, the focus that it's bad for agriculture, and therefore, the economy of the state as opposed to the communities is a better argument because it's bad for agriculture and the agricultural economy which gives the state a lot of money and jobs. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

All of that is economy to the state of California because we export fruits and vegetables internationally out of the state of California -- that brings California money. -- *South San Francisco Latina renter*

I think it is the strength. It is the power to keep [farming] here and keep it in California. -- *male Modesto renter*

The people utilize it and it is a way of keeping the price of food down. -- *San Francisco Latino renter*

It is cheaper for us to buy our fruit from California than it is being shipped over here. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

It is part of California. -- *female South San Francisco renter*

Are we able to produce what we need? If we exhaust all our resources and can't produce the food for the people that are living here, it is going to get to be a big problem. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

If they pave over a lot of farmland in Southern California, they are really shooting themselves in the foot. This is one of the bigger commodities in this state. -- *male Van Nuys renter*

Find a parcel that's not producing as well as some of the others and make a use of it to where it can produce more than what it is right now. Look at the way it's producing. If it's not producing as well as everything else in the outlying area, then use it. -- *male Modesto renter*

6. Stop the traffic

Sprawl produces more local traffic congestion.

Concern over traffic as a reason to control sprawl receives mixed reactions in the focus groups, but is generally seen as less important than other reasons. Although participants abhor traffic, they have learned to live with it and they do not see another option that is appealing to them.

Participants in Atlanta, Southern California, and the San Francisco Bay area are the most upset about the traffic problem where they live, and some are willing to change policies and even their own behaviors if it means less time sitting in traffic. But, many others remain resigned to gridlock.

You can't have a city without traffic. -- *male Grand Rapids homeowner*

You are going to have to accept that you are going to have some traffic if you are crazy enough to go out when it is that time of day. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

I think whether it is together or spread out, there is going to be traffic no matter where you go. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

Sprawl and moving people further away from the city center decreases congestion but the congestion will move out too. It will increase congestion too. So, it reduces it in the immediate, but eventually will increase it as it spreads out. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

The connection between sprawl and traffic and views about sprawl's impact on traffic are conflicted, just as they are about sprawl itself. Some participants believe that sprawl is causing more traffic and that the fewer new developments we build the less traffic we will have, but many others believe that traffic is caused by density and more "sprawl" or spread out development will alleviate traffic.

For some Californians, controlling development is a means to an end they like -- a more convenient, traffic-reduced lifestyle; but for others, the connection between sprawl development and traffic remains tenuous because of the unclear definition of sprawl.

Sprawl seems like they are moving away, getting further out. This sounds like sprawl would make traffic better. -- *male Boise renter*

I don't believe it because we are spread out. We are not going to have a lot of people up there to create more traffic and more crowded. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

Because sprawl being like you said, being spread out, I figure being stuck in the city would cause more local traffic congestion. If you spread out, you have a better chance. If I want to get from here to here, maybe go around instead of trying to cut right through the middle of town and avoid some of that. -- *male Modesto renter*

Sprawl does not necessarily produce more traffic congestion, but when highways and connectors and what have you are not [working]. We get back into planning. -- *male Grand Rapids renter*

D. Looking for solutions: Policies to fight sprawl

In each focus group, we presented four basic types of policies as possible actions that people could take to control sprawl: urban growth boundaries; purchasing development rights; alternative transportation policies; and keeping state funds in existing communities.

Attitudes about the policies reflect the values that people bring to the sprawl debate, such as freedom of choice, search for space, an appreciation of nature, security and family responsibility, and fairness. Often, the discussion of policies evokes a conflict of values, as participants try to sort out what is most important to them.

One constant in this discussion is a desire for more planning as an answer to sprawl. The participants see planning as a positive force for becoming proactive rather than reactive on issues of development.

1. Urban growth boundaries

Some propose to draw the line on sprawl in each community by designating portions of land outside cities as protected agricultural, forest and habitat lands, so that beyond a certain point or urban growth boundary, housing developments would not be allowed.

Local governments would specify some areas for urban development while preserving rural areas for recreation, natural habitats, and farming.

The idea of creating urban growth boundaries or plans to limit growth strikes most of the participants in our groups as a reasonable and effective way to slow down the inexorable

push to expand suburban limits and to preserve natural habitats for wildlife. Support for this proposal is often expressed as a way to protect the land that people want for recreation and to observe natural beauty.

Not everyone is enthusiastic, however. On the negative side, we heard the view that these "boundaries" limit choice about one of the most important freedoms in life -- the freedom to live where you want and can afford. But, those participants who hold a greater appreciation for the nature around them are more willing than others to override this value of freedom in order to protect another value -- to live in a pleasing natural environment.

Demonstrating what would be protected and how it will benefit people is absolutely necessary to attract support for urban growth boundaries.

I like that it would be protective to the waters, natural lands, and beaches. -- *male Boise homeowner*

I think all those natural habitats need to be preserved. -- *female West Palm Beach renter*

This is part of the planning. It allows for growth, expansion, and progress at the same time maintaining those other elements around the habitat and wildlife. -- *male black Atlanta homeowner*

I love living in the city, but I also love driving to the country. I like going over that hill and looking out at the farmland and seeing wide open spaces. I mean there's a sense of well being that comes from seeing open spacious land that we all need. We all need to feel the freedom of the beach, the ocean, the mountains, the snow, everything. Nature is a part of life and we need that. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

I like the proposal of controlling. I like designing portions of land outside the city that they are not going to build on and you can have open spaces. -- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

[Zoning] is a necessity to planning a city. It is the best way to preserve the balance. There needs to be cities but it is also nice to have open spaces. It is the only way to keep it preserved. -- *female South San Francisco renter*

Supporters and opponents alike are skeptical about leaving boundary decisions up to government. They believe in zoning as a necessary step in planning, but they have little faith in zoning board decisions. Many participants cite the changing nature of these decisions and a belief that corrupt government officials would draw the boundary one way to suit a campaign contributor and change it the next year to suit another contributor. Lack of faith in government to make wise decisions and to stand by them works against urban growth boundaries. Bringing citizens together to decide where the boundary might be drawn is an idea that increases the appeal of urban growth boundaries.

What if you own the land yourself? You are going to have some local government telling me that I have to sell it? -- *female Boise renter*

It is full of baloney. Somebody is blowing smoke. You cannot do that. What if I want to live outside the circle. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

If you are going to give the local government this much power, you could be in trouble. -- *female Waldorf homeowner*

It sounds too much like Big Brother. -- *female Traverse City homeowner*

What happens if we've already gotten to that line, we can't go any farther? -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

For those that are adversely affected, it feels like they are telling you what you can and cannot do with your property. You feel like you have lost your rights. -- *female Waldorf renter*

There are several things wrong with it. One, if I want to move outside the circle, my freedom has been taken away. If I own the land outside the circle and I wanted to sell it, you have taken my property rights away too. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

I like it but money speaks. The reality is you keep redrawing the line, that is why we have suburban sprawl. -- *female South San Francisco homeowner*

I don't think it will work. Money talks and if you've got five acres and nobody's sitting on it, and it's in the middle of a bunch of subdivisions and some new mayor gets re-elected, it's not set in stone. You see it all the time. Parks being subdivided and things like that, so it's a great idea if it works, but who knows down the road? Eventually money talks when you have that chunk of land being torn up. -- *male Boise renter*

While people want some certainty with decisions, they worry about the permanence of a boundary that might never be changed. Even some supporters have reservations about drawing a line or boundary because it connotes stopping growth instead of planning better. Some would prefer creating zones that would be off limits to development. It is not the boundary that they find attractive, but the idea of preserving land, or "pockets of green space."

Boundaries are negative, while protecting land is a positive idea. Stressing that the result is protecting green areas is more advantageous than emphasizing that the mechanism is boundaries.

We've got to keep in mind that we've got to leave some of our areas that are undeveloped so that we have a future living here. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

It makes sense because it is habitat and something worth saving. Tearing it down would not be beneficial to the environment. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

I like the statement because it has the forest and habitat lands in it -- that is the point of all of it. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

2. Putting state money into existing communities

State governments have a choice of where to put money for schools, police, economic development, and infrastructure. They can put that money into new, spread out communities, or into improving existing communities. Some people propose using tax dollars on existing urban and suburban areas rather than on new areas.

Many respondents applaud the option of spending state funds on existing communities rather than on new sprawl communities, but some are troubled by an all or nothing concept. Their hesitancy to completely condemn sprawl -- and in their minds, growth -- underlies their reluctance to endorse cutting off new communities from state aid for schools and infrastructure and economic development.

For some, this proposal is very appealing because they see it as a way to revitalize existing communities more so than as a way to put the brakes on new development. Some come to the conclusion that if we improve existing communities, then there would be no reason for people to keep moving farther out.

Many who support the idea still believe that, while keeping the lion's share of state aid for older communities, it is still necessary to provide some help to new developments. Key to this argument is demonstrating a sense of responsibility to improve what we already have first, before helping new areas.

To some extent, this proposal, like the cost of sprawl argument, is complicated by its need for people to understand how tax moneys are used. In the early groups, this proposal included reference to "state and local taxes," and participants argued about how their local or county taxes are dedicated in their local communities. Confusion is lessened when the proposal only includes state taxes, but it does not disappear.

I think you need to fix what you have. -- *female Waldorf homeowner*

For me, it is a good idea to fix what is broken rather than to start something else.
-- *female black Atlanta homeowner*

I don't think you can just keep spreading new communities without taking care of your existing community because all it does is push people to other places. -- *female Grand Rapids renter*

If you can improve your community, it gives people more reason to stay. They don't have to go to another community that has to build up to take these new people. -- *male Van Nuys renter*

The existing facility like police and things like that is already run ragged. Why not support them first and then work from the inside out. It is a lot easier to do it that way. It is a lot easier to conquer. -- *male Modesto renter*

3. Purchasing development rights

Another idea is for counties or local governments to use tax dollars to purchase the development rights to land to protect farmland, beaches and sensitive environmental areas near rivers and wetlands. Government would offer to buy the development rights from landowners, who would still own the property but would agree not to develop their property in return for receiving a cash payment to permanently keep their land for recreational or agricultural uses.

The use of government tax dollars to purchase development rights from landowners is met generally with a somewhat negative reaction across our groups. This idea suffers from a distrust of government, an unwillingness to spend tax dollars on farmers, and the uncertainty of what would happen to the development rights in the future. Many in our groups feel it is unrealistic to expect farmers or landowners to make a pact with the government that limits what a family can do with its land in the future. In addition, these participants also do not like committing money indefinitely to farmers who they see as already receiving too many subsidies.

The complications of this proposal diminish its appeal. It has too many variables: government, farmers, other landowners, tax collectors, promises on both sides. Such a deal seems unable to succeed.

Also, the label "conservation easement," which was used in some of the earlier groups, was difficult for people to understand.

Why should I give somebody who owns this multi-million dollar property more money?
-- *male West Palm Beach renter*

It's like farm subsidy. You pay the farmer not to farm the land. You're paying somebody for nothing. I don't go for paying taxes for that. I mean if it's for the community, then it's for the community. I don't want to pay this guy for the rest of my life, my children's life and my grandchildren's life. -- *female Van Nuys homeowner*

The farmer's been doing this for years, getting government subsidies to keep farming the land. It's not working. -- *male Boise renter*

I don't think that there can be too much control, because if the government offers these farmers or whatever and they're going to give them cash so if they ever sell it. How would we know? How would I be convinced that they're not going to go and build.
-- *Van Nuys Latina renter*

Well, they own the rights to the land and nobody can go and develop it. But if the city owns the right to the land, they could change your land at any time if somebody else gets elected. Or they can get real stupid and say that's a 100,000 dollar piece of land. And we'll give you a million dollars for the rights to it, because we can or something. That's something that sounds good, but you would have to really see it work to believe that it could be good. -- *male Modesto renter*

I don't think the government should be in the rental business. -- *male West Palm Beach renter*

It bothers me that government is involved. They could come in and change their minds about something and tell me what I can do on my land? -- *female Waldorf renter*

We have too much government in our life now. I don't think I would want to have a partner in land that I would be sitting on. I would worry about who would come back.
-- *female South San Francisco homeowner*

It is either the government who has too much power or some mucky muck who has too much power, either way it doesn't sound good. -- *female Van Nuys renter*

A simpler proposal of government buying land outright from farmers or landowners and preserving it as open space is one that our focus group participants have much more confidence in and is much more appealing.

Even more popular is an idea we explored only in Modesto, which proposes that the government purchase the land then turn it over to a local foundation or community group to run as a protected natural area. This was very appealing because it is a simple purchase that then eliminates government from the picture. Participants had confidence that local foundations would do a better job than the government protecting the land and making sure it is used properly.

I agree completely but it should be private groups. Why spend our tax money on this? There's conservancies around here that do this kind of thing. -- *male Traverse City homeowner*

Buy it outright. Spend a little more money and buy it outright. -- *female Boise renter*

Purchase it and donate the entire parcel like you said to some outside agency for that purpose -- that would work. -- *male Modesto renter*

4. **Alternative transportation policies**

City planners have said that new roads do not solve traffic problems in the long run because they invite more cars to an area, and cause more development and more congestion, not less. Therefore, we should use highway transportation funds for maintenance and repair and for alternative transportation, such as bus service and light rail, instead of for building more highways.

The idea of using highway money for road maintenance and repair and mass transit instead of for new road building is generally viewed negatively by the homeowners and renters across our focus groups. These residents believe new roads are necessary. They are more likely to think that new roads make life easier than that new roads create new development and congestion.

Roads are equated with progress, but people in our groups express an awareness that new roads are not the permanent solution to traffic, because the lanes eventually fill up. Participants often have difficulty seeing a long-term solution to traffic, so they fall back on short term solutions -- widening the roads.

Most do not agree that new roads just invite more cars to an area; instead they think that development comes first, then the roads. Even those who agree that roads bring development do not want to stop building the roads.

We are growing too fast to solve our problems with new roads. -- *female Atlanta homeowner*

I don't think roads are the problem. I think it is the people. If you are going to have people out places, you got to get there. I don't see people using [public transportation]. We have all just admitted that none of us have ridden the bus. I don't see bus systems as working and I don't see light rail in our area either. -- *female Boise homeowner*

The neighborhoods are already there. They need the roads to accommodate them.
-- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

You can't have a neighborhood without a road. -- *female West Palm Beach homeowner*

New roads will probably come before rail in Charles County. It takes a long time to get a metro rail, and we don't like the buses. -- *female Waldorf homeowner*

You can't force people to use public transportation. It is just not going to happen.
-- *male Grand Rapids renter*

We have too many people on too few roads. I am totally opposed to this because we need more roads. -- *female Grand Rapids homeowner*

I think you need to continue to build roads as the growth occurs. You can't stop growth.
-- *male Traverse City homeowner*

I think they should go ahead and open up the roads. More lanes, more roadways. I want to build more highways. -- *South San Francisco Latino renter*

If you had one road going across the mountain to Half Moon Bay, and it is absolutely congested, building another road is not going to make it more congested. I think it may alleviate some of the problem. -- *male South San Francisco homeowner*

Mass transit is generally not viewed in the groups as a workable substitute for roads. However, some participants are more supportive than others. Participants in Atlanta, Waldorf, MD, and California are the most likely to support expenditures on mass transit -- although they too would not want to give up new roads. Residents in Southern California are highly critical of mass transit (buses and light rail) in their area, but they do not want to abandon mass transit.

As I build more roads and highways, I'm now confiscating land from someplace. So I'm right back into consuming farm land, fewer open spaces. It's a catch-22. Therefore, you find some alternative to it and that is to provide some of these supportive alternatives. -- *male black Atlanta homeowner*

If they did use it to get public transportation where it would bring you closer to where you work, where you live, it would be a great idea. -- *male South San Francisco renter*

I think public transportation is positive because if you are stuck without your vehicle and you have got to be somewhere, at least you can catch the bus. -- *male Modesto renter*

To me, public transportation is kind of like life insurance. You really don't realize it is there until you need it. It is annoying sometimes to get behind a bus, but it is good that it is there in case you ever need it. -- *Van Nuys Latino renter*

Appendix

Housing Descriptions Presented in Focus Groups

Lot A

- Choice of medium to large house
- Built on a lot of between one-quarter to one-acre, in a community of similar houses
- Built on land far from the city, purchased from farmers
- Must drive to stores and restaurants. Main shopping area is a mall, a 30 minute drive
- No sidewalks, streets are wide
- Can drive to a nearby park and to school
- Takes longer to get to work.
- Big spacious yard
- Most streets have cul de sacs
- No town square
- Community of people of similar backgrounds and income levels
- Public transportation not nearby

Lot B

- Choice of small, medium, or large sized house
- Built on smaller sized lots in a community of various types of houses and apartments
- Built on land closer to urban area, or in a small town
- Stores and restaurants within walking distance of houses
- Sidewalks and narrow streets
- Children can ride bikes to school, to a nearby park, and to neighbor's houses
- Takes less time to get to work
- Small yard
- No cul de sacs
- A town square
- Diverse community with people of different backgrounds and income levels
- Public transportation within walking distance
- Farmland and other natural areas that are home to wildlife in countryside are preserved