



Detroit-Ann Arbor-Flint, MI CMSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Traditional/Middle America

Summary

Zoning and planning are nearly universal in metropolitan Detroit, but other measures to manage or control growth are quite uncommon. As in Cleveland, there are many townships that are growing while municipalities languish or lose residents. Most of these townships are zoned primarily for low-density residential development, yet two thirds would permit our hypothetical apartment development. Generally, Detroit appears to have a less restrictive regulatory environment for housing than many other large metro areas in the Great Lakes and Northeast.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

With about 5.5 million residents, the Detroit-Ann Arbor-Flint CMSA was the nation's eighth most populous in 2000. About 3.6 million residents live in 153 incorporated cities and villages with 1.9 million in the 172 townships. County governments play some important functions in Michigan and in some areas they conduct planning and zoning in the absence of it at the township level.

Metropolitan Detroit is losing density rapidly. Like several other metro areas in the Midwest, it lost population (a 2.0 percent decline) in the 1980s and staged a modest comeback in the 1990s, growing by 5.2 percent. Between 1982 and 1997, developed land grew by 27 percent (287,000 acres), almost as much as the Chicago CMSA (296,000 acres). But while Chicago added almost 750,000 people, Detroit's population grew by only 104,000. About 6 percent of the land in the CMSA is publicly owned.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses from 39 of the 153 municipalities in the metro area and from 43 of the 172 townships. Our respondents did not include Detroit. We estimate that all the municipalities in metropolitan Detroit have zoning and that about 30 percent of them use it to restrict densities to fewer than 8 dwellings per acre. About 13 percent of the region's municipal population live in these cities and villages, and they account for 14 percent of its incorporated land area. Thirteen percent of the municipalities would exclude our hypothetical apartment development, but these account for only 2 percent of the population and 4 percent of the land area. Almost all (96 percent) of the townships have zoning with about 55 and 37 percent restricting densities to a maximum of 8 and 4 dwellings per acre, respectively. About 31 percent of the townships would bar our hypothetical apartment development.

In all, 43 percent of the jurisdictions—with 20 percent of the population and half the land area—have low-density-only zoning. About 23 percent of the jurisdictions, with 8 percent of the population but 28 percent of the land area, would bar our hypothetical apartment development. About 20 percent of the jurisdictions have zoning ordinances in which the maximum residential density exceeds 15 dwellings per acre. High-density zoning is naturally much more pronounced among municipalities (37 percent)



than in townships (5 percent). Hence exclusionary zoning is moderately strong in metropolitan Detroit, but there are also many municipalities and townships that allow apartment development.

At the upper end of the density scale, an estimated 37 percent of municipalities but only 9 percent of townships have a residential density category allowing development to exceed 15 dwellings per acre. Even so, 25 percent of the townships would allow our hypothetical apartment development as of right in some zone, as would 31 percent of the cities.

All the municipalities and 96 percent of the townships have comprehensive plans. Growth management has not taken hold in a serious way, however. Infrastructure-related measures are rare; only 9 percent of the municipalities and 15 percent of the townships have impact fees, and just five jurisdictions in the entire region have an APFO. Containment programs are slightly more common. An estimated 20 percent of the municipalities and 15 percent of the townships have an urban service boundary, greenbelt, or urban limit line. About 10 percent of municipalities and 6 percent of townships have incentive based affordable housing programs.