



Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA CMSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Reform/Growth Management

Summary

The Los Angeles CMSA has added by far the largest number of residents of any U.S. metropolitan area in the past 25 years: over 5 million people. These residents are coming to the most densely populated major metro area in the United States, one that is hemmed in by federal land and topography and in which a large number of populous jurisdictions regulate the development process. Very few jurisdictions ban high-density housing entirely, though they may be reluctant to zone land for it. Because California limits local property taxes, the vast majority of jurisdictions demand that development pay its own way through impact fees and charges. Many cities also use APFOs. The least populous county, Ventura, differs from the rest of the CMSA in its jurisdictions' extensive use of urban containment and building permit caps. Elsewhere in the CMSA, fewer than a third of the cities and none of the counties claims a formal urban containment program, and around 10 percent of the cities and none of the counties use permit caps.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

The Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County CMSA is the nation's second most populous, with 16.4 million people in 2000, up 13 percent (1.8 million residents) in the 1990s and 42 percent (4.9 million residents) between 1980 and 2000. To put this 20 year growth into perspective, it exceeds the total population in 2000 of all but nine U.S. metropolitan areas, including Houston, Atlanta, and Miami; it also exceeds the 2000 population of 29 states. And if the new residents between 1990 and 2000 alone lived in a metro area of their own, it would be the nation's 24th most populous. Within the CMSA, there are 4 PMSAs: Los Angeles, with 9.5 million residents; Riverside-San Bernardino, with 3.2 million; Orange, with 2.4 million; and Ventura, with 750,000. Los Angeles and Riverside-San Bernardino both grew by about 660,000 residents in the 1990s, meaning that Los Angeles County grew by 7 percent and the Riverside-San Bernardino PMSA about 26 percent. Orange County grew by 440,000 (18 percent), and Ventura by 85,000 (13 percent).

Los Angeles is a region dominated by extensive and populous jurisdictions. In all, it has 179 cities and 5 counties. The Los Angeles CMSA had 77 cities in 2000 with at least 50,000 residents; Los Angeles itself registered 3.7 million residents that year. Four other cities—Long Beach, Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Riverside—had between 250,000 and 500,000 residents, and 29 cities had between 100,000 and 200,000 residents. Another 43 cities had between 50,000 and 100,000 residents, 84 between 10,000 and 50,000, and just 18 under 10,000. Counties control land use in their unincorporated areas. Los Angeles County has just under 1 million residents living in unincorporated areas, Riverside and San Bernardino between 250,000 and 500,000 each, Orange about 170,000, and Ventura about 93,000.

The Los Angeles metropolitan area owes its reputation for growth more to the scale of land development than for its low density. Just over 400,000 acres of land were developed in the CMSA between 1982 and 1997, a seemingly massive number. But for every one of these new acres of



urban land, the region added 9.1 new residents, the most efficient consumption of land in the U.S. Only three other metro areas (Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Honolulu) urbanized land at over 8 new residents per new urban acre, and only five at between 7 and 8. The Los Angeles CMSA urbanized only two thirds of the land that Atlanta did and less than 80 percent of what the New York CMSA did. Had Los Angeles urbanized land at the rate that the Boston metro area did between 1982 and 1997, it would have urbanized 3 million new acres, nearly twice as much as had been urbanized in the metro area's entire history up to 1982.

Geography and federal land ownership clearly contribute to metropolitan Los Angeles' recent development density. The region is crossed by several steep mountain ranges running both east-west and north-south and bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west. Furthermore, two thirds of the land is in public ownership, most of it federal land under the control of the Bureau of Land Management, National Forest Service, Department of Defense, and National Park Service. And a substantial amount of the undeveloped private land contains endangered species that require undisturbed habitat and brings developers to the bargaining table with federal agencies and local governments.¹

In addition, a very large share of the Los Angeles area's recent growth has been from international migration and from the children of immigrants. Both culture and resources lead immigrants to accept and live in high-density housing in the U.S. more readily than do native-born residents.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses to our survey from 91 cities and all five counties. The survey accounts for only 72 percent of the CMSA's population, but it takes in over half the cities and is therefore an excellent basis for estimates of non-respondents' land use framework.

The Los Angeles metro area is entirely zoned. Low-density-only zoning is extremely rare, practiced by perhaps 3 percent of jurisdictions, all of them very small cities accounting for a vanishing fraction of the regional population and land area. About 5 percent of the jurisdictions with 3 percent of the land area would bar our hypothetical apartment development. Consistent with the region's prevalent high density, nearly 90 percent of the jurisdictions have a residential density category that would allow development at over 15 dwellings per acre, and these account for 97 percent of the population. The cities and counties differ very little in the maximum density permitted by their zoning, although the counties tend to use low-density zoning much more broadly than cities do.

As required by California law, all the jurisdictions have general (comprehensive) plans save for a small handful that are in the process of completing them. Growth management measures are also widespread in the CMSA, especially those connected with infrastructure provision. Because Proposition 13 forced local governments to stop relying on property taxes for most infrastructure investment, over 85 percent of the cities and all the counties use development impact fees of some

¹ Jennifer Wolch and others, "Los Angeles; Region by Design," in *Sunbelt/Frostbelt: Public Policies and Market Forces in Metropolitan Development*, J.R. Pack, ed. (Washington: Brookings, 2005).



kind.² In addition, an estimated 40 percent of the cities use APFOs, but we did not receive responses from enough counties on the APFO question to generalize about their APFO adoption. Consistent with California laws requiring local governments to offer affordable-housing density bonuses, most of the cities and counties also report that they provide for a density bonus, and many report a series of other incentives and investment programs to encourage affordable housing.

Other land use measures vary by jurisdiction type and geography. Ventura County is strongly growth controlled; the county and most of the cities use growth boundaries, and 42 percent of the cities have permit caps. Over 90 percent of the residents live in contained jurisdictions, and 55 percent live in jurisdictions with permit caps. Outside Ventura County, however, the metro area has only modest levels of deliberate urban containment, with none of the counties and about 30 percent of the cities claiming a deliberate containment measure. Cities outside Ventura County also rarely use permit caps, with estimates ranging from 7 percent of cities in Los Angeles-Long Beach to 13 percent in Orange County. None of the counties has a permit cap.

² San Bernardino County reported not having impact fees, yet a review of its development code reveals that it does use impact fees for drainage, transportation, and recreational facilities that are calculated on the basis of area plans rather than countywide. See: County of San Bernardino, "Development Code: Division 11, Public Facilities Planning," (San Bernardino, 2006). Available at <http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/landuseservices/devcode.htm>.