



Memphis, TN-AR-MS MSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Reform/Containment

Summary

Based on limited responses to the survey, it appears that metropolitan Memphis has the makings of a new growth management system. There is little exclusionary zoning in the region; to the contrary, most of the cities and counties have zoning ordinances that are accommodating to higher-density development. In addition, a series of mechanisms in the Tennessee portion of the metropolitan area are setting the region up to match growth more closely with infrastructure capacity. The Tennessee cities have urban growth boundaries (UGBs) to help them plan more orderly annexation, and many of the cities also impose impact fees. But comprehensive planning is not universal. This system, especially the UGBs, was adopted after 1997, the last year for which sprawl measurements are available. It therefore remains to be seen whether incipient growth management can slow the sprawl that caused Memphis to slide from the 27th densest to the 40th among the 50 largest metropolitan areas between 1982 and 1997.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

The Memphis MSA had about 1.1 million residents in 2000, up 13 percent (130,000 residents) from 1990. It takes in 43 cities and five counties in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, with one county each in Arkansas and Mississippi and the other three in Tennessee. Only Memphis itself, with 650,000 residents in 2000, and Shelby County, with 118,000, had more than 50,000 residents in 2000. Three counties and 8 cities had between 10,000 and 50,000, and the remaining 34 cities and one county had fewer than 10,000 residents. Only 6 percent of the land in the MSA is owned by a public agency.

About 130,000 acres were urbanized in Memphis between 1982 and 1997, a 58 percent increase while the region's population grew by just 15 percent. As a consequence of this rapid development, density in the region dropped from a comparatively high 4.3 people per acre (27th most dense among the top 50 metros) to just 3.1 people per acre (40th most dense).

Regulatory Environment

We received responses to our survey from only six cities (14 percent of all municipalities), not including Memphis, and three counties (60 percent), which did not include Shelby County. Four of the cities were in Tennessee, with one in each of the other two states; all three counties were in Tennessee. Together, these jurisdictions account for 29 percent of the population and 51 percent of the land area. Our estimates, which are based on results from both Memphis and Nashville, must therefore be taken with some caution since they lack information from the region's two largest units of government. Furthermore, because we had very limited responses from small jurisdictions, we did not estimate the land use regulations for 32 municipalities and 2 counties, meaning that our metropolitan tallies do not account for about over 1100 square miles of land with nearly 100,000 residents in 2000.



The results suggest that Memphis is completely zoned, but that exclusionary zoning is rare. Perhaps 10 percent (four or five) of the municipalities and one or two of the counties have low-density-only zoning. The same set of counties, but only two or three cities, would not permit construction of our hypothetical apartment complex. The cities do not generally support high density either, however. Perhaps 10 percent have a residential density ceiling above 15 dwellings per acre. The balance of the counties (three or four) allow at least 15 dwellings per acre. Because larger cities tend to be more accommodating, about three quarters of residents live in jurisdictions in which residential density may exceed 15 dwellings per acre, and because counties also allow higher densities, two thirds of the land area is also in jurisdictions with higher-density zoning.

Tennessee law requires the development of urban growth boundaries as components of city annexation plans. As a consequence, all the Tennessee cities claimed to have a UGB, but only one of the three county respondents reported one. In addition, a majority (60 percent) of the Tennessee cities and one or two of the four counties are estimated to have impact fees, and 20 percent of cities have APFOs. An estimated 83 percent of the municipalities in the metro area have comprehensive plans; not all the Tennessee cities have adopted comprehensive plans, even though they all have UGBs of some kind. One or two cities in the region and one of the counties have an incentive based affordable housing program.