



Salt Lake City-Ogden, UT MSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Traditional/High Density

Summary

The Salt Lake metro area differs from several of the other Western metropolitan areas in its approach to land use regulation. While its jurisdictions are accommodating to high-density development, at least in their zoning ordinances, they make much less use of urban containment, APFOs, and permit caps, nor do they broadly adopt affordable housing programs. They do, however, make widespread use of development impact fees. Salt Lake County, whose unincorporated areas house more residents than does Salt Lake City, does not have a clear and unified approach to growth management, decentralizing its planning policies to a series of township plans that generally accommodate growth but do not contain it. When combined with moderately fast growth and geographically constrained land (dominated by the Great Salt Lake and the Wasatch Mountains), these regulations have kept densities from falling very much in recent years, but neither have they been strong enough to allow the region to hold or maintain its density like the Las Vegas or Phoenix metropolitan areas.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

The Salt Lake City-Ogden MSA, with 3 counties and 44 cities, had about 1.3 million residents in 2000, up 24 percent (261,000) in the 1990s and 47 percent between 1980 and 2000. Seven cities exceeded 50,000 residents in 2000; Salt Lake City itself had 180,000, and one other city (West Valley) had 109,000. Of the other cities, 16 had between 10,000 and 50,000 residents in 2000 and 21 had fewer than 10,000. The unincorporated portion of Salt Lake County accounts for about 210,000 residents; Weber County and Davis County have fewer than 20,000 people living in unincorporated areas.

The Salt Lake metro area sprawled moderately between 1982 and 1997, increasing its urban land area by 47 percent (83,000 new developed acres) while its population grew 33 percent. Its density at the beginning of the period, 5.3 persons per urban acre, made it the 11th densest of the top 50 largest metro areas; but its relatively swift land consumption caused its density to drop to 4.8 persons per acre by 1997, still 12th highest (between New Orleans and Philadelphia). About 68 percent of the land is privately owned, with 24 percent owned by the federal and 6 percent by the state government. State lands include trust lands that are subject to sale and development for revenue to benefit public education. The settlement pattern of the metro area is also shaped by the Great Salt Lake and the Wasatch Front, which form natural boundaries to growth toward the northwest and east.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses from 19 cities and Salt Lake County in the Salt Lake City MSA. (We did not survey Davis County, which had fewer than 5,000 residents in 2000.) Together, these account for 85 percent of the population but only 49 percent of the land area. Discussion of the county level



regulatory environment is therefore necessarily limited to Salt Lake County. Our metro area summary below does not include estimates for the 21 jurisdictions with fewer than 10,000 residents. Together, these account for 95,000 residents and 113 square miles of the metro area's 1,600 square miles.

All the cities have zoning. None have low-density-only zoning or would bar our hypothetical apartment development. Sixty percent of the cities with nearly 80 percent of the municipal population have a residential zone that allows development to exceed 15 dwellings per acre. Salt Lake County also has a residential zone that allows at least 30 dwellings per acre.

All the cities have comprehensive plans and many also use a series of measures to manage growth. Nearly 90 percent use impact fees, but only an estimated one or two use an APFO. Thirty percent report having an urban containment program of some kind. About a quarter have an affordable housing incentive program. Salt Lake County, the region's most populous jurisdiction, uses impact fees; otherwise, Salt Lake County indicated that it does not have the other tools. Although its respondent also indicated that it lacks a comprehensive plan, there are several mentions of a County General Plan on the county's web site, which shows that several of the county's six townships also have general plans. We lack information about either of the other two counties.