



## **San Antonio, TX MSA**

*Regulatory Order/Family: Wild Wild Texas/Dallas-San Antonio*

### *Summary*

Like the other Texas metro areas, the San Antonio MSA's density is holding steady while they drop almost everywhere else in the South. This maintenance of density is partly a consequence of its jurisdictional framework, in which the central city (San Antonio) has annexed aggressively and captured most of the new development, bringing not only city services but also city zoning along with it. Furthermore, the larger cities all use impact fees, which associate strongly with denser development patterns. Government-imposed urban containment is practically unknown in the region (as elsewhere in Texas), but this combination of city-centered growth and impact fees may amount to a market-based containment program.

### *Governance Framework and Growth Trends*

Metropolitan San Antonio had 1.6 million residents in 2000, up 20 percent (270,000 residents) in the 1990s. About 1.3 million of these residents live in 44 cities, with the balance living in unincorporated areas of four counties. The city of San Antonio has over 1.1 million residents; its county, Bexar, has about 150,000 residents in unincorporated areas. Five cities and the other three counties (Comal, Guadalupe, and Wilson) have between 10,000 and 50,000 residents, and the balance of the cities (32) have fewer than 10,000 residents.

Like the other Texas metro areas, San Antonio's land consumption (36 percent) ran only slightly ahead of its population growth rate (33 percent) between 1982 and 1997, meaning that it maintained its density of just over 4 persons per urbanized acre over the period. Because most of the other top 50 metros lost density faster, San Antonio's rank among these regions leapt from 29th to 19th densest. Only about 6 percent of the land area is publicly owned, with a substantial share of the federal land in military bases.

### *Regulatory Environment*

We received responses to our survey from San Antonio and three other cities; we did not survey the counties, because like other Texas counties they lack most powers to regulate development in unincorporated areas. The four respondents account for 75 percent of the population but only 14 percent of land area.

Based on these results and others from the non-Houston MSAs in Texas, we estimate that all the cities in the MSA have zoning. City zoning tends to accommodate high-density development, with 75 percent of the cities allowing development to exceed 15 dwellings per acre and only a few small cities restricting density to fewer than 8 dwellings per acre. None of the cities would bar our hypothetical apartment development. The counties have no zoning, meaning that density is limited only by the availability of sewers and water supply; generally, lots over one acre are required for each house on a septic systems and well.



All the cities have comprehensive plans. To the extent that cities manage growth, they do so with infrastructure measures; about three quarters of cities—and virtually all the cities with over 10,000 residents—are estimated to use impact fees, and a third (mostly the medium-sized cities) have APFOs. A few very small cities are estimated to have a containment system of some kind. Perhaps a quarter of the cities, including San Antonio itself, have incentive programs for affordable housing, but these incentives do not include density bonuses.