



San Diego, CA MSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Reform/Growth Management

Summary

San Diego is a growth management region, with strong local requirements for new development to pay its own way through impact fees and APFOS. It also has a series of conditions (topography, public land ownership, habitat for endangered species) and policies that limit outward expansion. Local governments accommodate high-density development; only one or two municipalities currently have building permit caps, though some APFOs may serve as covert controls on the pace of growth. It is also a remarkably non-fragmented region, with just 18 units of local government for its 2.8 million residents. Together, these forces—along with rapid growth and a sizeable immigrant population—helped San Diego retain a density above 7 persons per urban acre throughout the 1980s and 1990s and its rank as the fifth most densely populated of the 50 largest metro areas.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

The San Diego MSA had 2.8 million residents in 2000, up 13 percent (316,000) from 1990 and 51 percent from 1980. San Diego, the largest city, had 1.2 million residents in 2000; three other cities—Chula Vista, Oceanside, and Escondido—had between 100,000 and 200,000 residents, and nine had between 50,000 and 100,000. The MSA also has seven smaller cities, only one of which had fewer than 10,000 residents in 2000. San Diego County, the MSA's sole county, had nearly 450,000 residents living in unincorporated areas in 2000. Its nearly 150,000 persons per jurisdiction average makes San Diego the least jurisdictionally fragmented among the 50 largest metro areas.

Metropolitan San Diego has lost little density in the last two decades; its urban land base grew 40 percent between 1982 and 1997 while its population grew 37 percent. The region started that period with the fifth-highest metropolitan density at 7.2 persons per urban acre, and its 7.0 persons per urban acre left it in fifth place by 1997. Confined by the Pacific Ocean on the west, the Mexican border on the south, and extensive federal and state lands on the east, the San Diego metro area is seriously constrained. About a quarter of the land is federally owned, a quarter state owned, and another seven percent owned by county and local governments, leaving just 43 percent of the land in private hands. Most development has occurred along the Pacific Ocean. That urbanized coastal strip is prevented from "joining" greater Los Angeles because the U.S. Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton blocks northward expansion. Restrictions on the conversion of habitat for endangered and threatened species has created further incentives for high-density development.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses from 11 cities and San Diego County, which together accounted for 85 percent of the population and 97 percent of the land area. It is a completely zoned, high-density-accommodating MSA, with only one or two jurisdictions (small cities) barring development above 15 dwellings per acre and none excluding our hypothetical apartment complex.



The San Diego MSA is also a growth management region. Thanks to California's Proposition 13, infrastructure control is widespread through impact fees (estimated to be in place in at least 90 percent of cities as well San Diego) and APFOs (in 35 percent of cities and San Diego County). The county and about 35 percent of cities claim an urban containment program of some kind. Building permit caps are much less common than in other California metros, with six percent of cities reporting them. All the cities and the county have incentive programs for affordable housing.