



San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA CMSA

Regulatory Order/Family: Reform/Growth Control

Summary

The San Francisco Bay Area is a region contained by geography and policy. Its natural features lend themselves to compact development. Public land ownership contributes less to containment in the Bay Area than in other western metro areas. Instead, public policy guides development, with state imposed limits on development near the coast and at the margins of San Francisco Bay and widespread use of municipal and county level urban growth boundaries. The region has grown compactly in part, too, because most jurisdictions (both the cities and the counties, in unincorporated areas) allow high-density development, at least according to their zoning ordinances. Impact fees are nearly universal, especially in the developing parts of the metro area. Building permit caps appear to have dwindled in popularity but still are in place in approximately 10 percent of cities and two of the nine counties.

Governance Framework and Growth Trends

With just over 7 million residents in 2000, the San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose CMSA is the fifth largest metro area. It grew 13 percent (790,000) in the 1990s and 31 percent (1.7 million) between 1980 and 2000. The CMSA has six PMSAs: Oakland (2.4 million residents in 2000), San Francisco (1.7 million), San Jose (1.7 million), Santa Cruz (255,000), Santa Rosa (460,000), and Vallejo-Fairfield-Napa (520,000). The CMSA has nine counties, 104 cities, and one combined city and county (San Francisco). San Jose, with about 900,000 residents counted in the 2000 census, is the CMSA's largest city; San Francisco had about 775,000, and Oakland 400,000. The fast growing city of Fremont, between Oakland and San Francisco, has just over 200,000 residents. Eight other cities had over 100,000 residents and 22 between 50,000 and 100,000. The metro area has 48 medium-sized cities and 23 small cities. Seven of the nine counties have over 50,000 residents in their unincorporated areas, with the two largest—Contra Costa and Sonoma—having about 150,000 each. Alameda and Santa Cruz each have 135,000 residents, and Santa Clara has about 100,000.

San Francisco is a compact metro area, with about 910,000 acres of developed land in 1997: less than two thirds the amount of developed land occupied in the Atlanta MSA. Developed land grew about 25 percent between 1982 and 1997 while population grew 22 percent, nudging the metro area's density from 7.6 to 7.5 persons per urban acre. Even with this decline, however, the metro area retained its ranking as the fourth most densely developed. With several coastal mountain ranges and the shorelines of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay, the Bay Area's geography leads to natural containment. Only 17 percent of the land area was owned by governments in 1992, but much of the land is restricted by voter imposed limitations on coastal development.

Regulatory Environment

We received responses to our survey from 60 cities and six counties, representing about 70 percent of the metropolitan area's population and land area. The largest non-respondent was the city of San



Jose. We used the responses as well as those in Sacramento to generate estimates of land use regulations for non-respondents.

Like the rest of California, the Bay Area is entirely zoned. Only an estimated three percent of jurisdictions have low-density-only zoning; perhaps four percent would not permit our hypothetical apartment development, but none of these exclusionary enclaves accounts for even one percent of the metropolitan population or land area. Over 90 percent of the jurisdictions have zoning ordinances allowing development over 15 dwellings per acre; these account for 97 percent of the metropolitan area's population.

Planning is mandatory in California, so all the respondents have a general plan. Growth management and growth control have a long history in the Bay Area in jurisdictions like Marin County, Petaluma, Livermore, and Santa Cruz County. About 90 percent of both cities and counties are estimated to have impact fees, and about a third use APFOs. Urban containment is widespread, with growth boundaries and urban service areas in place in two thirds of counties and 40 percent of cities. Permit caps are less popular than they used to be, with an estimated 10 percent of cities employing them at present; two of the nine counties also have permit caps. Consistent with state mandates for density bonuses and housing planning, about 90 percent of cities reported and 75 percent of counties reported having incentive programs to foster affordable housing development.