

Many residents are concerned that Colorado Springs is becoming a city of sprawl and unaffordable growth. Leaders in the public and private sector have long argued that growth is necessary to increase incomes and the local tax base. But a flurry of proposed tax increases to maintain levels of service and deal with a capital backlog calls this theory into question. And growth seems to have raised prices faster than wages for many and contributed to an affordable housing problem.

In response, the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments established a Citizens Advisory "Optimum Growth" Task Force. It included representatives of the Home Builders Association, the arts, and citizen organizations. Their report, authored by Colorado College professor Richard C. Bradley and staffed by economist Dave Bamberger is fascinating reading. It cites recent city tax increases, less availability of parks, and more pressures on police and fire departments. Regarding the cultural benefits of growth, it finds a smaller share of the local population involved with the arts after a decade of rapid growth than before.

As it looked at other cities around the country, the PPACG report found that all but the smallest cities experienced rising costs of per capita with population increases. Despite oft-cited expectations that growth would bring affluence to the Pikes Peak region, the report shows that metropolitan areas with the highest growth rates did *not* have the highest per capita income growth, or lower unemployment and poverty rates.

The year? 1973. The effect on decisions made by local governments since then? Almost none. One year after the Bradley report, *Costs of Sprawl- A Detailed Analysis* was published. This national study by the Real Estate Research Corporation analyzed costs of service for the new American suburbs and found them to be consistently greater than traditional city development patterns. The high costs of growth cities all across the U. S. were experiencing appeared to be due to new patterns of development.

Almost thirty years after PPACG's Bradley report, we again see a growing backlog of road repairs, declines in police and fire response times and calls for new taxes. During the growth boom, taxes have been passed to purchase open space, to build new schools while old ones are abandoned and to maintain roads and police and fire protection. Subsequent studies by the state of Florida and the Urban Land Institute also found substantial cost differences between "sprawl" development and more compact designs. Capital expenditures for roads are 25% more, utilities are 15% higher, and school construction costs rise by 5-7%. In many cases, operating costs for police and fire are also greater.

Even before the passage of TABOR spending limits the evidence was clear that continued growth in sprawl patterns would prove unaffordable at current tax levels. It appears that we have followed a "don't ask, don't tell" policy when it comes to the affordability of different patterns of growth. Those who let studies sit on dusty shelves while they move forward are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past.

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