

## BASIC LAND-USE POLICIES



# PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY

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Sound planning requires that Riverside County adopt the following basic policies regarding residential land use:

1. Development projects will be allowed enough density to enable them to recover the costs of required public improvements and environmental protections at a reasonable charge per dwelling unit.
2. Density transfers and clustered development will be permitted on all properties, provided (a) the resulting lots, setbacks, and yards meet the County's minimum urban standards and (b) adequate provision is made for the on-going ownership and maintenance of the remaining open space land.
3. To further encourage dedications of land to open space and protect wildlife habitats, property owners will be allowed to transfer, sell or purchase unused development rights within the boundaries of adopted community plans.
4. Private property will not be assigned to open space, public use, and other noneconomic uses until it has been dedicated to those purposes by its owners, incident to the approval of their land-use applications, or has been purchased or otherwise acquired by a public entity.
5. County maps showing areas allocated to future open space, "future choice", or other uses or densities different from those permitted by existing zoning will be used only for planning purposes and will not have regulatory status.
6. Property owners dedicating land to non-economic uses at the County's request will be allowed sufficient additional density on their remaining land to offset the value lost.
7. Constraints on the use of hillside and other impaired land will be modified or waived if an applicant can demonstrate that his or her proposal meets the County's technical development standards and there is proper environmental and hazard protection.

Table 1

LAND USE IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA  
OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY

<u>Land Use</u>	<u>Square Miles</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Public land designated open space	4,296.2	63.2
Private land designated open space	<u>1,860.7</u>	<u>27.4</u>
Subtotal, open space	6,156.9	90.6
Private land in adopted Specific Plans, zoned for residential use, or otherwise not designated open space	<u>639.5</u>	<u>9.4</u>
Total, unincorporated area	6,796.4	100.0
Breakdown of private land:		
Open space	1,860.7	74.4
Other	<u>639.5</u>	<u>25.6</u>
Total	2,500.2	100.0

Sources: Riverside County Planning Department (open-space allocations); Housing Lands Inventory Addendum, 1985, Housing Element, Riverside County Comprehensive General Plan.

## IMPACTS OF PRESENT POLICIES

As shown in Table 1, attached, 91 percent of all land in the unincorporated area of the county has been declared "open space", and the ratio is increasing. Only 37 percent of the total area is privately owned, moreover, and 75 percent of the private land has been designated "open space".

More recently, other private property has been classified "future choice". Like "open space", this designation places a cloud over the utility of the land, affects its marketability and value, and contracts the County's tax base.

Also, thousands of additional acres of potential residential land have been subjected to large-lot zoning, shrinking the tax base further and making the land generally unusable for attractive "planned" development.

Finally, normal residential construction has been prohibited on land having a slope of 25 percent or more. This restriction is eliminating opportunities to create hillside "view" developments of great residential desirability and value, and is denying the County another important tax and assessment resource.

A continuation of these policies will:

1. Destroy many millions of dollars' worth of potential land value, constrict the County's tax base, slow the growth of public revenue, and create increasing financial difficulties for County Government.
2. Limit the County's financial ability to deal effectively with the problems of growth, including protecting the environment.
3. Condemn much of the undeveloped portion of the county to land uses of poor and deteriorating quality.
4. Drive home prices up markedly, progressively denying housing opportunities to young families, single parents, the elderly, and minorities.
5. Reduce job opportunities and consumer purchasing power, depressing the County's overall economy.

## DISCUSSION

County Government depends heavily on growth for its day-to-day operating revenue. Therefore, as Ventura County has

learned, land-use policies that place excessive restrictions on development eventually create financial difficulties for local Government.

When development is curtailed, or property values are impacted, the growth in revenue from property taxes, developer fees, State and Federal funding contributions, and most other money sources also slows. Yet the revenue needs of Government keep increasing, if only to pay for mitigating the effects of earlier growth.

Thus, unless present policies are changed, the County increasingly will have less money available to pay for its important social and environmental programs and the provision of public services.

#### Impacts on the Environment

Environmental protection costs money, yet under large-lot zoning neither the County nor developers usually can afford to provide adequate protective measures and facilities. In most cases, revenue potentials per acre are too low to support more than minimal improvements and protections.

Large-lot development also does the greatest environmental damage. It exposes much more of the land to human access than does conventional development, requires more land area for roads, destroys wildlife habitats by preventing development clustering, and makes it difficult financially to create protected open-space preserves and parks.

For financial reasons, all of the land in a large-lot development usually must be incorporated into the lots themselves, and sold. Customarily, none of the land can be retained as common open space under the care of a Homeowners' Association or some other suitable communal entity; there are not enough homes in the development to support these management costs economically.

#### Impacts on "View" Development

As shown in Figure I, attached, a 25-percent slope is quite moderate by Southern California standards. Many of the region's finest residential communities have slopes greater than this, and they constitute an important tax resource. Yet, under the County's present policies all land having a slope of 25 percent or more is classified arbitrarily as "open space" and not available for conventional residential development.

#### Impacts on Housing Supply and Price

Large-lot zoning is exclusionary; it inherently requires home prices that only upper-income families can afford.

The zoning, moreover, makes very large land areas unavailable

for conventional housing. It therefore restricts the supply of that housing, and drives up its price.

#### Impacts on the Economy

In Riverside County as elsewhere, residential development is the principal force creating and sustaining local economic growth. It creates demands for building services, retail sales outlets, banking and other financial services, schools, governmental services, and a host of other supporting activities. And, as the population grows, it generates a labor pool that attracts manufacturing industries from outside the area.

The reverse, of course, is also true. Large-lot zoning and other land-use policies that discourage normal residential development inevitably lead to a downturn in an area's economic well-being.

#### Impacts on Land-Use Quality

Wherever allowable densities are too low to support the cost of required public improvements, attractive "planned" development is infeasible. Thus, in areas of the county where large-lot zoning has been imposed, the effects generally are as follows:

1. Developers cannot afford to provide an adequate public infrastructure, and the tax base produces insufficient revenue annually with which to maintain roads and other public improvements.
2. Property owners and developers are forced to resort to lot splits ("four-by-fouring") and other parcel-map land divisions that minimize improvement requirements.
3. Because conventional homebuilding is precluded, developers tend to turn instead to speculative lot-sale programs. Yet few of these programs impose meaningful deed restrictions ("CC&Rs") on the use of the property.
4. Few homeowners, finally, are able to maintain lots as large as one acre, 2 1/2 acres, 5 acres, or more, at least for long. Sooner or later, most are forced by age, infirmity, or financial constraints to let much of their property go, and the part that is not maintained increasingly becomes a storage area for old car bodies, broken equipment, and other unsightly material.

As a result of large-lot zoning, then, there are an increasing number of areas in the county in which the public infrastructure is inadequate and deteriorating, there are few if any controls on development quality, homebuyers have little investment protection, land uses are of a mixed and uncertain nature, property values are depressed, private investment is

discouraged, there are inadequate financial means of protecting the environment, and blight is spreading and threatening to become permanent. It is therefore essential that prompt action be taken to change the particular governmental policies that are responsible for creating these conditions.

Impacts on Land-Use Regulation

Finally, land-use zoning in the county is being superseded by County planning maps that inadvertently have acquired a regulatory status. As a consequence, established zoning procedures are being circumvented and property values are being affected unnecessarily. It is therefore important that the Open Space and Conservation Map and similar planning maps be used only internally by the Planning Department and not have any external regulatory purpose. Land uses should be regulated only by the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive General Plan and the zoning designations that have been assigned to property in accordance with that Element.

Figure I

MAXIMUM PERMITTED SLOPE  
OF LAND NOT DESIGNATED  
OPEN SPACE

Unincorporated Area of  
Riverside County

