

# The Benefits of Compact Development

## Why is compact development important for good transit village design?

To support a vibrant neighborhood with shops, jobs, and homes in walking distance of each other, with public plazas, parks, and community services, and a connection to the wider region through rapid transit, a Great Community needs to be a compact neighborhood.

In a compact neighborhood, stores have enough local customers to stay in business, transit systems have enough riders to justify the public investment, and parks have people strolling through keeping the neighborhood safe. Community services including childcare, medical offices, banks and post offices also have branch locations frequented by people living within walking, biking or transit distance.

Key to making the connection between TOD and housing is the built in ridership provided by a variety of compact housing types from apartments, condominiums to starter homes. Locating compact development next to transit often results in improved service as transit agencies can justify the improvements based on consistent ridership levels.

*Compact development around transit stations minimizes traffic, supports transit, improves air quality, preserves open space, supports economic vitality, creates walkable communities and provides a range of housing options.*

## Myths and Facts about Compact Housing

**MYTH:** It creates more traffic and parking problems than low-density development.

**FACT:** Residents of more compact housing tend to have only one car per-household, compared to 2 or more cars in lower density neighborhoods. According to the National Personal Transportation Survey, doubling density decreases the amount people drive by 38%. Residents of condos and townhouses make 44% fewer trips per day than those who live in low-density developments.

**MYTH:** It overburdens public services and require more infrastructure support systems.

**FACT:** The compact nature of higher-density development requires less extensive infrastructure to support it, making delivery of basic services like mail, trash collection, and police and fire protection more efficient. The nature of who lives in higher-density housing—fewer families with



The housing adjacent to the Whisman Rail Station in Mountain View, CA is 18 units per acre.



Metrowalk, Richmond, CA is within walking distance of both the BART and AMTRAK train station. The entire project has 132 units on 13 acres.

children—puts less demand on schools and other public services than low-density housing.

**MYTH:** It leads to higher crime rates.

**FACT:** A random sample of 600 calls for service in Phoenix, Arizona, found that an apartment unit's demand for police services was less than half of the demand created by a single-family house. With more people and activity within the same amount of space, communities in compact developments have greater safety.

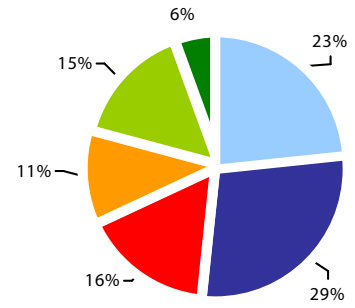
**MYTH:** Higher-density developments lower property values in surrounding areas.

**FACT:** No discernable difference exists in the appreciation rate of properties located near higher-density development and those that are not. Some research even shows that higher-density development can increase property values.

Researchers at Virginia Tech University have concluded that over the long run, well-placed apartments with attractive design and landscaping actually increase the overall value of detached houses nearby. They cite three possible reasons. First, the new apartments could themselves be an indicator that an area's economy is vibrant and growing. Second, multi-family housing may increase the pool of potential future homebuyers, creating more possible buyers for existing owners when they decide to sell their houses. Third, new multifamily housing, particularly as part of mixed-use development, often makes an area more attractive than nearby communities that have fewer housing and retail choices.

**MYTH:** Nobody wants to live in compact housing developments.

**FACT:** Many people do want to live in apartments or condominiums, even in suburban areas. Many seniors and "empty-nesters" want to move out of their large house but stay in the same town. Many young people don't want the added maintenance responsibilities of a house and private yard. As the figure to the right shows, the number of married couples without children for the first time surpassed those with children. The growing demographic group of DINKS - Double Income No Kids are also more likely to live in compact housing.



Married couples with Children (23.3)  
 Married couples without Children (28.2)  
 Other family households (16.4)  
 Men living alone (11.2)  
 Women living alone (15.2)  
 Other nonfamily households (5.6)

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March; and Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2003.

## Well Designed Compact Developments Reflect the Surroundings

The following are design elements that help achieve appropriate compact design.

- Buildings with varied surfaces
- Pedestrian friendly design
- Well defined open space
- Landscaping
- Parking hidden from the street
- Shared facilities
- Mix of uses: retail, housing, office and community services



**19 units per acre**  
 Open Doors  
 Los Gatos, CA



**31 units per acre**  
 Paula Ave. Apartments  
 San Jose, CA



**47 units per acre**  
 Lorin Station  
 Berkeley, CA



**77 units per acre**  
 YMCA Villa Nueva  
 San Jose, CA



**85 units per acre**  
 Hismen Hin-nu Terrace  
 Oakland, CA



**129 units per acre**  
 Oakland Chinatown, CA