

Smart Growth:

Editor's Note: Last November, we surveyed San José residents to find out what you think of City services. While all ratings were positive, one area that you expressed concern about was how the City manages growth. Read on to learn more about how the City plans its growth and how those plans protect our community as we grow.

Imagine a city where everyone feels safe; where parents walk their children to nearby schools, parks and libraries; where new housing is affordable for most; and where people live, work and play in a vibrant downtown.

Now imagine that city with a transportation system designed not just for cars, but also for bicycles, pedestrians and transit riders; and imagine a permanent greenbelt protecting the hills surrounding this city.

And finally, imagine this city has jobs for all of its residents and a tax base to pay for high quality public services—the trash gets collected, the streets get paved, the community centers provide youth programs, and police and fire protection is readily available.

What you've just imagined, is the "smart growth" vision for San José that has been guiding our city's development for nearly three decades. While still a work in progress, we have made impressive strides towards controlling the outward sprawl and expansion of the city that was typical in many fast growing cities after the Second World War. Now, our growth is targeted for downtown, transit corridors, and other strategic areas.

This is a significant change from the 1950s and '60s, a 20-year period when San José's population grew from 95,000 to more than 445,000 people, and the city's land area expanded from 17 to 137 square miles.

General Plan

In 1975, the City Council created a plan to end this uncontrolled growth. In California, all cities and counties must have a General Plan to guide development. The *General Plan '75* established an Urban Service Area (USA) that defined where City services such as sanitary sewers, water, and storm sewers would be provided. Outside of this area – on hillsides, at the edges of the Bay, or in the southern reaches of the city – development at urban densities was not allowed.

Fostering balanced economic development became important to San José so the City could attract

and retain jobs for its residents, reducing long distance commutes across the County and ensuring a strong economy that is needed to pay for essential city services for existing neighborhoods. Land was set aside for future economic expansion in North San José and Edenvale.

While *GP '75* set policy direction for managing future growth, it also laid a framework for preserving existing neighborhoods. Since 1975, the San José City Council has adopted two major updates to the General Plan: *Horizon 2000* and *San José 2020*. Both Plans continue the land use strategies of the earlier Plan and reinforce them through additional policies.

"Our emphasis now is on achieving the most efficient use of land and ensuring a good quality of life in our community," said Laurel Prevetti, Acting Deputy Director of Planning Services for the City of

Smart Growth and Transportation-Oriented Development

"Transit-Oriented Development," a key strategy in San José's Smart Growth plan, is designed to locate new housing and business ventures along public transit corridors (light rail, heavy rail, and bus lines) throughout the city.

"The goal is to place appropriate residential and retail developments within 2,000 feet of a transit station, which is considered to be a reasonable walking distance for most people," explained Jim Derryberry, recently retired Director of Planning for the City of San José. "Our hope is to increase the percentage of families with just one car."

That means the City has come full-circle from when it first experienced widespread growth in the early 1950s. Walking to school, stores, playgrounds, and even to jobs was typical in small towns and bigger cities throughout much of the history of the U.S.

Mixed land use—where jobs and homes and retail shops are integrated—is a return to "the good old days," according to Wayne Tanda, director of the Transportation Department. "Rather than hop into the car to go anywhere, people can walk or bicycle. It not only reduces traffic congestion, it uses less energy and generates less pollution."

Pat Colombe, a principal planner with the City, noted, "Low density development is at cross purposes with public transit. Instead we want to cluster people around any transportation option that provides fast, frequent, and reliable service."

Imagine A City...

San José. “We are in a valley that is bounded by hillsides, baylands, and wetlands and most of the appropriate areas for development have already been built. Now, the focus on development is recycling land to new uses.”

Managing Growth for Quality of Life

The City is directing more intensive growth to Downtown and to corridors with light rail transit or major bus service, so that these areas can evolve to a more urban setting while protecting the character of San José’s existing neighborhoods. This approach also protects hillsides and other sensitive lands from development pressure.

San José’s continued focus on maintaining a high quality of life in neighborhoods has been demonstrated most recently through new programs to improve traffic safety, more attention improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians, the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative, and recent bond measures to improve and expand parks and libraries.

Joe Hedges, of the Office of Economic Development, said San José has become a model for other cities grappling with growth issues. “The challenges we are dealing with are the result of success,” he noted. “We have what everyone else wants...but like a successful company, we have to continue to innovate and improve. That’s progress.”

Of course, any discussion of growth involves the issue of traffic congestion. The General Plan links San José’s land use development with transportation infrastructure. “New housing is great,” said Wayne Tanda, director of the City’s

Transportation Department. “New jobs are great. But we must also be concerned about the livability quotient for our residents and be environmentally sensitive.”

While there are no plans for new freeways in Santa Clara County, projects are underway to eliminate bottlenecks. This includes enhancing Highway 87 (Guadalupe Parkway) to a full freeway between Coleman Avenue and Highway 101, and a \$65 million investment in the Highway 80/Coleman Avenue interchange to improve access to the San José International Airport and Downtown.

In addition, San José has launched several initiatives to upgrade existing streets and sidewalks, and improve traffic flow on major thoroughfares. The City is in the sixth year of a 10-year program to catch up on deferred maintenance of streets. Additionally, a major emphasis is on using new technology to monitor and control signal lights and employ other technological tools to protect pedestrians and bicyclists

“There is a renewed focus on promoting bicycle use on city streets and bike paths and encouraging people to feel safe to walk,” noted Tanda. “Most suburban cities are set up to move cars. Our job now is to encourage the use of alternative methods of transportation.”

Growth of any kind raises questions of where it should go, how much of it should occur, and whether the infrastructure and services are in place to support it. These questions will remain part of the San José dialogue as we plan our future to meet population

How to Get Involved

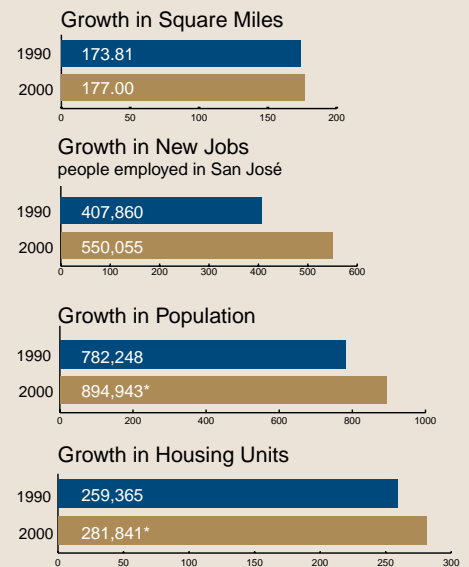
Want to know more about San José’s Smart Growth strategies or participate in the plan? Here are a few suggestions on how to get involved:

Stay in touch with growth and development issues in the City: Log on to www.ci.san-jose.ca.us/planning/sjplan

Participate in a regional discussion on growth issues through the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project. Led by the Association of Bay Area Governments, this effort is evaluating different “futures” for the Bay Area, including smart growth. For more information, go to www.abag.ca.gov/planning/smartgrowth.

Learn more about smart growth principles at these sites: www.smartgrowth.org and www.cnu.org.

Statistical graphs showing 10-year growth comparisons



(*Actuals based on 2000 Census release)

increases from longer life spans, better health care for children, and a historic trend of migration to California.

Planning for housing and other growth in the right places, however, should result in San José meeting its long-held vision.