

**MANAGING GROWTH AND WORKFORCE  
HOUSING IN EDGE COUNTIES**

**FINDINGS OF  
THE FANNIE MAE FOUNDATION  
EDGE COUNTY INTERVIEWS**

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November 11, 2003**

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# **MANAGING GROWTH AND WORKFORCE HOUSING IN EDGE COUNTIES**

## **Introduction**

In percentage terms, no set of counties in large metro areas has grown faster decade-by-decade since mid-century than the 54 counties assembled for interviews as part of this Fannie Mae Foundation project examining growth and housing. The sustained growth in these counties generates the by-now familiar litany – a refrain voiced repeatedly in interviews with county officials – of problems created and exacerbated by rapid growth, including congested roads, crowded schools, lagging infrastructure, and tendencies towards developmental sprawl.

There are reasons why growth came so ceaselessly to these counties, called Edge Counties<sup>1</sup>. Officials speak of the continued quality of life, the high performance schools, the superb location, and the open spaces and rural feel. Of the 37 counties contacted, most still have an equilibrium maintained between the good and the poor qualities of rapid growth. Crowded schools have not (yet) disrupted quality. Congested roads have not (yet) overrun the general quality of life. But the tipping point looms in the minds of many of those interviewed. It becomes their day-to-day task to outrun that tipping point.

The 37 chief planners, county executives, planning directors, regional supervisors and others in county leadership positions whom researchers reached for interviews all spoke matter-of-factly regarding their day-to-day challenges of maintaining community quality of life in the fast growth lane. Rapidly growing areas – with an onslaught of governance, fiscal and commercial decisions on land use – overtake the community resources devoted to handling growth. Leadership supplied anecdotal stories that show that working with the planning tools and laws leftover from the days of leisurely growth means longer working hours for them to compensate for antiquated planning tools and laws, a need for adaptability, and adjustment of objectives. The interviews show how remarkably complicated is their task in the face of a less than complete planning and legal toolbox.

A significant segment of the other large U.S. counties have experienced unfettered growth in recent years. Fannie Mae Foundation sought through the interviews in this research to obtain experiences of leaders in these 54 counties, surmising that they might have messages from the frontlines of growth that could benefit those coming up behind them. What follows is their account.

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<sup>1</sup> The 54 Edge Counties were assembled by Robert Lang and Patrick Simmons using these criteria: counties in the 50 largest metropolitan areas within the 200,000 to 800,000 population range and with a double-digit population growth every U.S. Census since 1950.

## **Interview Procedure**

The interviews were conducted from June-August 2002 and May 2003. Researchers were careful to locate respondents within the counties who had extensive knowledge of county policies related to growth. In a few instances, this meant that respondents were not as knowledgeable regarding housing policies and could not respond to those questions.

The interview questions were open-ended, designed to learn what was uppermost in officials' minds. These telephone interviews lasted from half an hour to an hour in length. The open-ended format created a source of rich detail. A respondent's neglect to mention a program means only that it did not come to mind during the interview, not that the county has no such program. These open-ended interviews therefore cannot be used to count the number of like programs running from county to county. Respondents spoke with the premise of anonymity.

## **Research Questions**

The Fannie Mae Foundation sought first-person perspective on numerous questions:

- What growth problems are uppermost in these counties?
- How are these fastest growing counties coping with the influx of people?
- What policies are in place to handle rapid growth or encourage affordable housing?
- How does the state affect county efforts to deal with rapid growth?
- What housing problems are uppermost in these counties?
- What specific affordable housing issues exist?
- Does the local community influence county efforts to handle growth or affordable housing availability?
- Does rapid growth affect housing affordability?
- Has there been intergovernmental assistance on encouraging affordable housing?
- How can private developers become more interested in affordable housing development?
- Are there efforts within their region to work more collaboratively on growth or housing?
- Is there a relationship with the core city?

## **Features of Counties**

The depth of the interviews transformed a similar-looking set of rapidly-growing counties into a highly distinct group with unique characteristics. Interviews show the counties to have an unexpected diversity of characteristics. Some of the counties are entirely incorporated, and others mostly unincorporated. Some are collar counties on the far-flung fringe, and others are first-ring counties that juggle maturing older neighborhoods while breaking ground for brand

new neighborhoods. Some have significant land use authority and responsibility; others have none. One official reports that their county plan dictates everything to the jurisdictions within it. Growth must pay for itself, including infrastructure. All smaller community plans within the county are covered by this county general plan. Some of the counties are part of interstate areas, making cooperation with neighboring counties or the core city especially difficult. “No, we do not work with them.” an official notes of jurisdictions across state borders. “They are not in same state. We might make an exception, as with the bi-state tax work, which would have to be approved by both state legislatures.”

The large counties with a supply of available land for construction are among those that still contain affordable housing and growth-oriented impulses. One county, thousands of miles large, was reported to “not have much anti-growth attitude – here growth is welcome. Managing and directing it are the challenges.” Other counties, often smaller or constrained by unusual geographies, are running near empty of developable land. “It doesn’t take a degree in economics to realize that if there is less land, then the cost will go up,” an official observes, “and there will be pressures on farmers, open space, and the lower-cost housing market.” One fast growth county, nearly the smallest in its state, but near the top in population, has only two farms remaining within its borders.

There are other unusual variations. Some counties, where all their roads are state or municipal owned, can not so directly influence transportation, while others have significant transportation responsibilities and capabilities. Other counties rely on ferries as an important part of their transportation network. When urban counties are able to control their own road system, including the placement of road improvements, they are given a tool to direct where development and growth occurs.

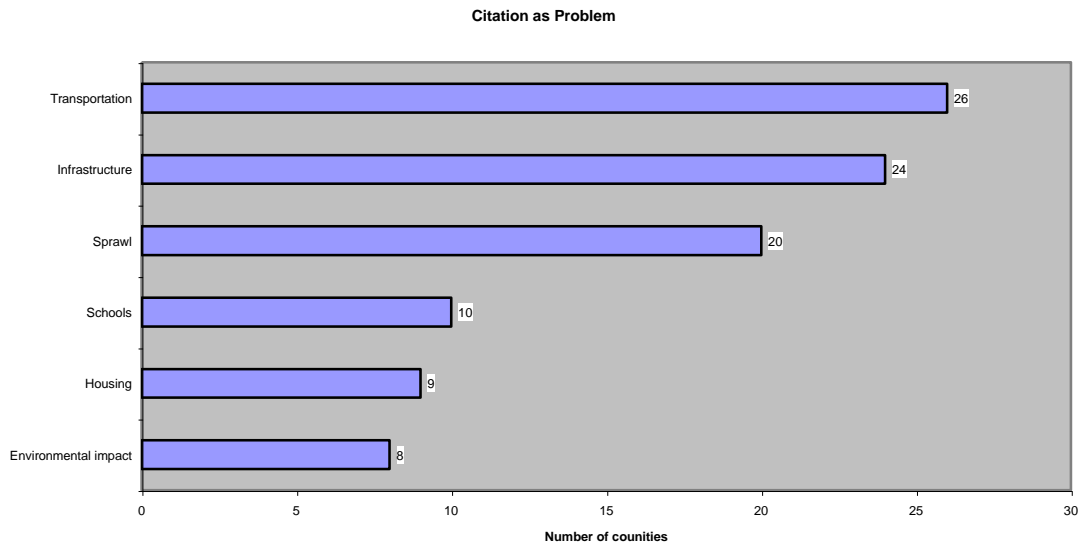
Numerous counties are entirely incorporated, lacking any population in unincorporated territory. In others, four-fifths of their population still resides in unincorporated territory.

Part of the variability within this group of counties derives from the definition of Edge Counties, which some respondents quickly recognized. One individual observes, “Look at the numbers. In our area, we are the smallest county. In terms of population growth, this means our percentage change can more readily spike. [Two nearby counties] have much bigger population growth, but they are large, so their percentage change is on a lesser scale.”

## What growth problems are uppermost in these counties?

All county officials say that in their counties, growth is either a problem, or is a problem, but not a serious one. Altogether, 23 officials indicate that there are serious problems related to growth, and 14 indicate that there are problems but that they are not serious.

County leaders mention three growth themes significantly more frequently than other themes: transportation, infrastructure, and sprawl. They either mention one of these three generally or they may more specifically cite a situational incident within their county, such as the need for a better transportation system to the region’s core. Other themes mentioned less often include schools, housing affordability, and environmental impact.



Talks with county officials provide an appreciation of the complex forces at work in these metropolitan areas. One official uses the phrase “domino effect” to characterize the impact of growth upon the region. An official with a Midwestern county, one that sits between collar counties more to the fringe and the inner-ring suburban counties more towards the core, reminisces, “As a child, I remember people stating that someday [nearby city] would be in the SMSA. Well, now it is.” Urbanization extends miles beyond those childhood expectations. The official continues, “There are no jobs in these outlying collar counties. They come through my county to get to jobs in [the core city]. One of these outlying collar counties has a website where they noted that they have 15,000 working-age job-eligible residents, and only 7000 jobs in the county. But they live there because they can get more house for the same price. We are a county through which these others travel. We are providing the infrastructure for them to get to the jobs without getting their tax dollars. There are limited tax dollars. We will not see new state and federal highways. As traffic becomes more congested on the major highways, we see it shifting over and backing up onto our county highway system which was not designed for this. It is having a domino effect. County roads had an intended capacity that we are reaching sooner than expected.”

The concept of “the domino effect” reappears again and again in various guises during conversations with officials. In outlying collar edge counties with plenty of available land, where all growth is still prized for its economic benefits, domino effects result from these pro-growth decisions. Said one, “When we build big box retail [to benefit from the tax dollars], it drives mid- and lower-housing out of the county. The reason land use patterns look like they do is because the housing situation is aggravated by [this push for] taxes.”

For every positive action, there quickly can be a detrimental reaction.

The exponential pace of development in the runaway growth counties outruns most traditional planning tools. This means that for every positive action, there can quickly be a detrimental reaction. Housing (without jobs development) in outlying areas leads to traffic congestion on major roads and on arterial streets as all residents try to get to jobs, and even basic services, elsewhere. Economic development can raise land prices and drive out affordable housing. Yet in some counties those same rapidly escalating property values permit elected officials to reduce taxes and still keep pace with infrastructure demands.

## Consequences of rapid growth are predictable, but officials lack necessary resources to intervene ahead of these consequences.

County planners and managers in fast-growth regions have to be far ahead of the consequences – which county execs say are predictable – in order to accommodate policies to affect those consequences. Getting a lead on the consequences requires resources that they are often unable to access. These include funding, political will, citizen support, integrated planning, and implementation of policies, as the interviews reveal.

For example, the planners where big box retail is arriving have a policy in mind to address the domino effect that development will have on taxes in an effort to be ahead of the consequences, but face political obstacles, noting that “cities are not interested in making [tax] equality happen. We are trying for a per capita based distribution [of taxes] rather than a point of sale which is inequitable.” Another county in the West wants revenue sharing for similar reasons, “We need revenue sharing between rich and poor communities, since the housing communities are providing the workers and the revenue is coming from the economic communities.”

In another region dealing with tax issues, leaders talk of how the state’s tax policy is the biggest hindrance to affordable housing, observing that, “Communities just don’t want affordable housing because of the impact from the tax rate. We have been fighting this for a long time. We went all the way to the State Supreme Court, and the Court ruled against the state.” They are not alone on these conclusions. Elsewhere, a county official relates that, “The biggest perpetrator is state policy on tax laws. All cities are competing for dollars, and housing becomes a burden. It is a net loss. Commercial is a net plus.”

Policy efforts to handle growth will be influenced by judicial judgments, political decisions and economic interests. Some counties report a citizenry motivated by environmental and open space ethics, a citizenry who also influence policy adoption.

## Cohesive urban management requires public policy agreement on common principles

Cohesive urban management in these long-term fast growth counties rests on an implemented planning or policy document where its core principles are adhered to by all jurisdictions in the county during public policy decision-making. This type of document allows planners and political leaders to take ameliorative and integrated steps that might not otherwise be tolerated within the community. Without such a document, two scenarios appear. The effects of growth have to escalate to crisis proportions before action occurs. Or the effects of growth are addressed in one policy arena, only to create or shift problems to another policy area, the domino



effect. “The extension of services to growing geographic areas, if not managed properly can be very expensive. If not done the way it ought to be done, the older people and older parts of a community end up subsidizing this new growth.” A situation is handled – more housing is put up so that more taxes can be collected – but then schools become more crowded and roads become more congested. More jobs are introduced and roads become more crowded. More roads are built outward, and the cost to provide urban services increases.

These choices on provision of schools, affordable housing, infrastructure and so on, are generally accommodations to political forces, economic interests, or judicial decisions instead of conscious adherence to a set of common public principles that guide a county’s growth.

There are some exceptions to this general statement. Some edge counties have common principles in a document that creates cohesive urban management. Two examples are provided, one from a Midwest county and another from an East Coast county.

## Cohesive urban management example – county home rule type

This Midwest county illustrates an integrated policy approach to growth management.

“We are a rapidly growing county so we have to make sure our new growth is affordable and does not contribute to environmental sprawl type problems. At the same time, as we grow away from [our core city], we have to continue the ability to keep the older parts of our community in good repair and attractive. They are probably equal. Our effort – called ‘Preserving our Future’ – means new growth has to be equal to maintenance of what we already have in place. We have had a series of community meetings and summits and out of that effort is emerging the citizens’ view, the desire to balance the new growth with maintenance of existing development – and our elected officials agree.”

“The extension of services to growing geographic areas, if not managed properly can be very expensive. If not done the way it ought to be done, the older people and parts of community are subsidizing this growth. People are moving here for quality of life, and when they move to the urban fringe area, they want the same level of services that everyone else has. This gets rather expensive. So, how do you pay for that? You adopt a policy that says new growth has to pay for itself, but that policy has to be planned very carefully. They will say they do not want that tax burden. You must have the appropriate kind of mixed development – commercial and residential – and the supports that are needed in building community. There are problems with this fringe development because distances are further out, this makes transportation difficult, and people have not bought into mass transit . . . If the community keeps sprawling, it won’t have the compactness to provide mass transit.”

This county has zoning policies and comprehensive plans that encourage certain types of development within city limits. While the county issues thousands of residential permits, only a small percentage of permits are in unincorporated areas. Their planning policies help encourage the in-fill type of development. A comprehensive plan is in place. The county is now updating the plan in partnership with the 21 cities within the county; and will include changes that make it less attractive for development further from the core. They have been successful to date at concentrating population within incorporated areas. Half the county land has been incorporated, and 97 percent of the population resides in the incorporated territory.

The county runs utilities and services— such as public health, libraries. — for the whole county, and can be characterized as a very municipal-like county. It runs many of what would be considered municipal services and does so county-wide -- and for all of the municipalities also.

They produce all the water for the whole county. It is more cost effective for one county than for 21 cities to do separately, and they note that it gives them some control over development and makes things much simpler. They believe it may help with the bond rating.

County leadership is examining other policies to complement their present plan, for example with a look at their sewer development policy and an excise tax. Right now sewer development and growth is ‘developer-and-market-driven’—if the market is there and developers meet the criteria, the county will put sewers in. The thought is to tighten it up; while the county is not market insensitive, they want to better control policy. If county extension of a particular service to the fringe is too costly, they are looking for a way to have the developer accept the county’s conclusion. Their hiring of a deputy county manager was with a nod to have him help with infrastructure.

As part of the infrastructure reexamination, the county is considering an excise tax. For those looking to build out in the county where the rules are less strict and it is cheaper, use of an excise tax could help pay for infrastructure demands that come about through growth. The county official states that the county does not see it as revenue source, but sees it as a message to say, “Look, it isn’t cheaper to build farther out.” It reinforces the policy of directing growth towards the core to avoid sprawl, and does so by encouraging in-fill development. These decisions become very important growth management tools. The excise tax would be applied to all unincorporated areas; cities already have excise taxes.

## Cohesive urban management example – voluntary type

Counties have to take a different approach where states give the municipalities most of the control, an approach using public education, technical assistance, and persuasion.

“We have been experiencing rapid growth, adding 8000-9000 units a year, all during the last decade and also 8-10 million square feet of commercial and office construction a year. [Our county] has some of the best soils in the world. The farming land is exceptional, but it is being compromised by easements,” a county official explains. He describes a sophisticated county government with 2500 employees in a county that is very wealthy, where the median price of a home is \$350,000.

The service array of the county is unusual. All roads are state or municipal owned, though about a hundred bridges are county-owned. They run the courts and prisons, but have no water treatment or sewage treatment responsibilities.

In 1996 the county comprehensive plan, called “Landscapes”, was tied in with boroughs and townships plans. As regards the plan, there are 300-350 elected officials making decisions. “Our county budget for local planning assistance to local governments is more than [our state’s] for this.” The county also does significant public education. At the time of the development of the county comprehensive plan in 1994, 20,000 citizens responded to a flyer placed in the newspaper. At that time, 250 acres a week were being lost to development.

The county provides technical assistance to 73 municipalities to see that their individual plans are consistent with the county comprehensive plan. Before a municipality makes a decision on their comprehensive plan or zoning, they must send it to the county. The county has 30 days to respond. The county gets 50-60 of these a month. If a municipality has a land use plan, it supercedes the county’s plan. The county is advisory only. “This process is an enormous problem,” a county leader says, “because it works to fragment land use.” The county has a further hurdle in its ability to communicate with local elected officials, because they are part

time. “We work on Memorandums of Understanding with related townships,” the official says. The county does a consistency review – a critique and audit of the local plans.

All 73 municipalities do open space and recreation plans. The county has created a plan that relates how things work together between the county and the townships and boroughs, called “Linking Landscapes.” The official asks, “How do we link these spaces between the plans, especially habitat linkages, so bunnies can go through one end of the county to the other?”

The county completed its county-wide transportation plan, called “Connecting Landscapes.” The official comments, “People here believe in one car, one person. We are experiencing increasing congestion.” There is a limited regional bus system. The official reports that some companies run their own shuttles, siphoning limited clients from the public system. When the county made an effort to run special transit from immigrant neighborhoods to take residents up to jobs, the immigration officers showed up and made arrests. Service is limited and nearly invisible. The county official relates another call he received from a citizen in a small area community, where the citizen asked, “Does the [public] bus go through here?” He says he responded with a “Yes,” and the caller replied, “Thank goodness! I saw a driver on it alone, and I thought the bus had been stolen.”

## Basic urban management examples

Most county managers do not have a toolbox that reads cohesive urban management. Many are proficient at wielding a variety of tools to address the most serious challenges and accomplish successful outcomes for their counties.

### - fiscal

One of the more integrated examples comes from a Southern county where the financial plan is the linkage for the various policy pieces that guide county management. The county official says, “In order to be able to deal with the information and services arising from rapid growth, you need a stable financial platform and long range planning.” The county was so successful at this approach that it was only one of a handful of counties nationally in the late 1990s to receive a “triple triple” bond rating from Fitch Ratings, Moody’s Investor Service, and Standard and Poor’s Corp. (Now there are 20 counties with this status.) The county has a 50-year water/sewer plan, long term parks and rec plan, open space and greenways plan, master plan, and an overall comprehensive plan of the planning department. “The plans are linked to reality through the capital improvement plan and the six year budget.” The respondent indicates that they give the commissioners information that helps them think and make decisions for the county for 25 years out to the future. So when the county determines it needs three new fire trucks, the commissioners can be shown precisely how the purchases fit into the six -year budget plan. “This connected fiscal and planning attention preserve the “triple triple” bond rating,” according to the administrator.

### - regulatory

Another coordinated example comes from the South. The issues this jurisdiction must face are fairly complex and they have to tackle them and take them on one at a time. For

instance, the general development plan of 1997 divided guidelines for growth/housing/transportation issue/storm water management growth management - the key issue; not only for state for each jurisdiction. Their situation is more critical because they front a large body of water monitored by Critical Areas Legislation. There is a desire for more residential/commercial development. But in order to have development, the county requires improvements in infrastructure. The county needs adequate public facilities and to learn how they meshing with the desire for growth . . . hence the passage of the Adequate Public Facilities ordinance. “Development desires could outpace our infrastructure. If we, the public sector are going to bear our responsibility, must be cognizant of cost implications.”

Currently there is a high demand for residential development. In order to ensure that the request for develop doesn't overburden existing facilities, those requests must go through adequate facilities testing. All residential (and also commercial and industrial) goes through this APF test, residential development shouldn't outpace public infrastructure - roads, schools, water/sewer. The limitations on capacity are placed at the school levels. The contact reports, “We are adhering to them, whether with infrastructure we have or measured improvements to infrastructure. We are reviewing the policies and regulations. We are going to include forecasts where improvements must take place based on school capacities.”

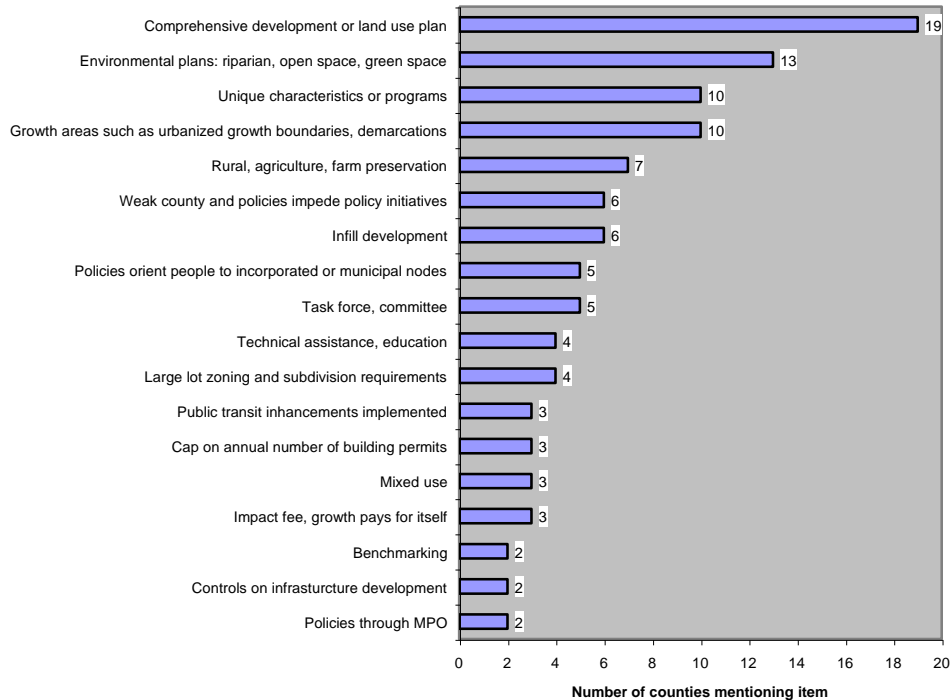
One APF applies to schools; another applies to roads—this is similar throughout the county. Individual schools are tested on an individual capacity basis as to which school would serve the proposed subdivision best. The county is doing the schools initiative because it is complementary to the development plan, the general plan, the small area plan, the greenway protections, and the bike and pedestrian plan. Also, it is doing so because of the State's preservation of agriculture programs. “Our subdivision regulations apply to any land that is to be divided or assembled, and thus the APF test also applies. While others may apply the APF test to roads of only 50 trips or more, we don't (have that minimum) do that in this jurisdiction,” according to the official.

## Basic urban management tools

Most counties, for many complicated reasons, lack this extent of integrated tools for county management. For them, it is much as a Western county official observes, “We have no unified planning requirements, no requirement that links service provisions with growth concurrency. Schools are separate from local government so growth has had a big impact on schools because there is no way to legally connect them. We tried to do impact fees for schools and lost at the Supreme Court.”

Some individual tools can help achieve a measure of integrated planning. Without prompting, county officials made multiple references to more than a dozen types of tools in use to shape growth policy. Most often mentioned have been general comprehensive development or land use plans, followed by specialized plans. Growth areas such as those created through growth boundaries or urban service demarcations were the third most frequent item cited, along with tools unique to specific counties. These tools are referenced throughout this report.

### Tools to shape growth policy



Less frequently mentioned are tools such as benchmarking which is used to track a county’s progress so that policy assessment can occur. Two counties in a Midwest state maintain such programs. Says one official there, “In terms of service levels we are involved in benchmarking activities to make sure we are providing services effectively and efficiently.”

Other counties simply wield traditional planning tools to their maximum capacity. This Southern county reports that they don’t have a typical growth management strategy—if anything. But “we have very strong support for planning from the board and administration. We have a very basic and traditional planning program.” The county has used traditional planning tools—comprehensive plan, zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, etc. The county effort is not trying to stop or slow growth but direct it to places where it should occur. Their policy is to provide the highest quality development possible, without any deliberate effort to control growth.

## Transportation

By a slight edge, transportation is the most serious problem to the counties (26 of 37 counties mentioned it). The most frequently mentioned local problem related to transportation by far is congested roads (17 mentions), cited five times more frequently than the other items that included lack of public transportation, the need for more arterial streets, the need for a new beltway/freeway/interconnector, or the need for a new transportation system to the core. Nine note transportation without providing details. Individual comments about transportation reflect

this theme, “Traffic congestion is increasing drastically — it has increased 80 percent over twenty years with only a 29 percent growth in population.”

Some counties, where all roads are state or municipal owned, can not as directly influence transportation, while others have significant transportation responsibilities and capabilities. When urban counties are able to control their own road system, including the placement of road improvements, they are given a tool to direct where development, thus growth, occurs.

Counties also look towards transit to reduce congestion. These decisions involve how to expand service, how to get people to have more interest in it, how to provide service to low to moderate housing, how to integrate private transit systems into public plans. They often are made through the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region, an organization that many officials mentioned. But MPOs have no requirements to practice the cohesive policy management that works so well for counties adhering to its practice. Transportation planning in isolation from planning for land use, schools, and other single focus planning, may promote congestion or impact economic development further into the future - the domino effect.

The interconnectedness of the problems is a constant companion of conversation with county officials. For many counties, growth has overwhelmed the transportation system – both for personal trips and business travel, and for intercounty and intracounty travel. But the issue goes far beyond too many cars on the road. One county official traces the origins of their transportation gridlock to the quirks in state tax law that formed cities in excess and enabled long stretches of urbanization within and between surrounding counties. “We went from 7 percent of commuting out of county to 27 percent out of county now after 15 years,” the county official observes. He reports that the only transportation money comes from their state gas tax which has not been increased in 12 years, is not indexed for inflation, and only pays for maintenance. No money is left over for anything else. The result is that no road building has been done. Spending on transportation has been level for 20 years. He comments, “The growth was predictable – the housing is cheaper than in the city.” Confronting the transportation crisis, the state legislature passed two transportation bills – one significantly raised the gas tax specifically to build highways; another enabled the creation of a Regional Transportation Improvement District. The counties that are parties to the transportation district have not collectively reached agreement to initiate it. Discussions center on how to equitably apportion regional money, given that spending may need to be directed more heavily into one county’s road projects. Public transit is also on the agenda.

A West Coast county reports that transportation failings hindered economic development. “Disjointed transportation resulted in the county not experiencing the late 1990s employment surge that other parts of the region experienced. The growth pressures that were a huge problem in the late 1980s and early 1990s dropped off. The county didn’t get the second economic blip others in the region did because of the transportation shortfalls that it has. Insufficient transportation inhibits commercial exchange.” Now the county is involved in a project where cities and counties in the region describe in priority order the transportation projects needed.

Transportation may be fragmented due to multiple special transportation agencies within a region. A growing Southern county has now reached the population threshold for the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), a special federally-mandated regional transportation planning agency. “We have two central places and could have two MPO,” the official says.

Some counties are testing special transit zoning and transit districts.

One state has formed a regional transportation authority where a local official says some agreements have been crafted. Speaking of the transportation authority, the official says, “They try to figure out how they want to dance with the counties.”

A Midwest county brought forward an initiative for a transit oriented development zone, but reports that it didn’t go over well because it would include denser housing.

Other counties, as in this Southern one, have integrated transit and land use into one plan. A number of counties were working towards this goal. The plan designates five corridors for rapid transit. Other corollary initiatives appear in the plan, including investment studies in four communities. In development stage are transit oriented zoning districts. The county soon would hold a stakeholders meeting where the development community and the public were invited. Unusual geography can make the jobs of some transportation officials more complicated in these sustained growth counties. One official mentions a large river, noting that the commuters into the central city have as their only choice the highway that parallels the river and that “they can’t cross until after they go through our county.” Another contact mentions that their county is fairly small, but more so has an exceptionally narrow passageway of only two miles at one part of the county. It is going to require usage of light rail, commuter rail, or an express bus. A third county has major lakes and swamps that impact transportation flow. Quite a number of the counties are in semi-arid climates where growth does cluster in incorporated areas to reduce reliance on well or septic systems.

## **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is second as the most often cited serious problem (24 of 37 counties mentioned it). Infrastructure problems that respondents mention include insufficient water supply, mentioned slightly more frequently (11) than the next nearest three problems: meeting needs for infrastructure and services while balancing available fiscal resources, of maintaining infrastructure and services while managing or controlling growth and development, and of tax/revenue caps that squeeze infrastructure development plans. Mentioned infrequently is insufficient recreational and park area. Two county respondents mention infrastructure, but do not expand their comments.

Infrastructure problems can rapidly balloon when there are no built-in county policies that monitor the county’s delivery of infrastructure against the rate of growth. One deputy county manager observes, “In the 1970s, we didn’t keep up with our needs. Now we have to meet the challenges for today while catching up.” The county has a better planning system in place, a comprehensive plan that specifies a level of services for each of five elements. Under these levels of services, the county asks developers for special donations for infrastructure. The county tries to assign a dollar value to each development in the zones for these five categories. The preferred amount for one single family home is \$16,000 to \$18,000. Schools are \$10,000. “We are now finally building schools faster than we are adding students,” the deputy manager reports. “In 8 to 10 years, every student seat will be in a permanent school. We are behind more than that in parks. The kinds of parks that people wanted 20 years ago [neighborhood] are different than what they want today. Today, they are into specialty parks, water parks, soccer parks.” The county is behind as well in public safety supply. “Our goal is to build a fire station every other year for the next thirty years. For libraries, we are close to the standards that we have set.” He says, “Developers originally were very concerned” so the county “just tweaked on

the margins.” They are fortunate to be in a high growth market (housing \$350,000-\$500,000), which gives them the ability to set conditions. “We want to balance housing and jobs, and this is one approach.”

Some of the biggest challenges have to do with financing the infrastructure that goes along with growth. Tax policies that are worked into a cohesive urban management plan such as the excise tax mentioned in the urban management section or the above conditional zoning with impact fees are used.

An East Coast county has had impact fees for 15 years. They hadn’t changed until eight months ago, when they passed revised impact fees. The fee is applied to developers at the time of issuance of building permits. The official reports that fees were raised to address the demand for development and to try to offset costs to improvements to infrastructure. They have had a school fee and a transportation fee. The recent legislation also added a fee for public safety measures, such as police, fire, and emergency medical services, in addition to increasing the rate.

When counties do not have impact fees, they might benefit from special districts to finance specific services. The most common special district is the school district. One official notes that school districts in the region have implemented these fees. Though the county had not invested in the educational infrastructure, “three school districts have impact fees - \$1800 to \$4200.”

Special districts allow more flexibility but county officials cite the disconnection from policies. A Western county mentions their immediate problem of wildfire and drought. The problem for the county is that it doesn’t provide water and sewer. These are provided by special districts. “The schools are challenged and still are, but we don’t run the school district, either.”

Special districts focused on transportation were discussed earlier in the transportation section.

A Southern county official cites “the tri-state water wars” of his region. “It is a difficult issue and hard to maintain wildlife in those [border] areas.” He adds, “We are very fortunate in this county to have strong sewer department. It is separate utility and funded through user fees . . . We have to have some of those collaborative agreements to be able to do things. We will see more of that in the future as things become more regional. The challenge for so many jurisdictions is that they agree with you, but how they address it or fund something may be very different.”

Officials from several of the counties in one of the metropolitan areas cite the recently created multi-region water planning district. Says one, “We are recognizing that there is a finite quantity of water in [our] region and we must allocate these scarce resources . . . The chairman of each county and the majors are represented, legislators and the governor.” The jurisdictions don’t all match up to the major metropolitan area, but correspond to the watershed. The communities opted for a district in order to have a correspondence to the watershed and more direct control and accountability,

One region has placed the decisions about sewer and water – which impact growth patterns – into their regional council. Counties are also dependent on them for funding certain amenities like park acquisition

Other counties have established task forces to review infrastructure needs as in the example from the South. “We have a growth management task force that has been working for two years. It includes elected officials from all the towns, counties and the school board . . . There will be a toolbox and recommendations out in Fall 2002. The official also mentions the county’s Watershed Management Task Force, reporting, “The county effort goes way beyond



what the State requires . . . Right now we are trying to merge water and sewer systems. Two or three have merged already. More are on the way.”

Urban services boundaries are used as a tool to direct growth. This particular Midwest county uses urban service boundaries with regards to sanitary sewers – prohibiting septic in certain areas in order to concentrate development in more confined areas.

When fast growth counties do not use special districts to provide water and sewer, or do not engage in these municipal-type services themselves, they must fall back onto their septic and well systems to sustain the infrastructure for their growth. Because lot sizes may be zoned at larger levels than can support water-sewer hook ups, the zoning hurdle must be jumped before water-sewer issues can be met. Says a Midwest respondent, “The county has higher lot sizes and wells, and septic is what we have. You are looking to the municipalities for lower end housing. The county is not into sewer and water systems. Our smallest lot size is ½ an acre, and there’s not much of that. If we were to do sewer and water, we would need a smaller size lot to be able to provide it efficiently.”

These above examples rest on state laws that are supportive.

State laws have the power to be disruptive of local efforts at cohesive urban management. The county planning director of a western county commented, “Usually down at the legislature, we’re running damage control. What they want to do is not in line with our commissioners. We’ve been successful lately, because luckily what the legislators have wanted to do recently has not been passed. So the state hasn’t had major impact on how we do business. They did change vested business regulations and it’s been difficult to get business interests since.”

A deputy county manager comments, “We must go to the state for subdivision regulations – and that can only happen twice a year. Zoning is different than this, and not frozen to a twice-yearly schedule.”

## **Sprawl**

Sprawl is third of the most often cited serious problem (20 of 37 counties mentioned it). The sprawl issue was raised most frequently in discussions on maintaining infrastructure and services while managing or controlling growth and development. Instances where officials talked first of lacking enough resources to handle the rapid growth because of its demands on infrastructure (7 mentions) nearly equaled those who noted their challenge in balancing jobs, housing, smart growth, and the environment. Less frequently cited in the interviews were the issues of generally directing and managing growth, revitalizing maturing areas, and outmigration of the younger generation. Seven responded that growth/sprawl was a problem, but did not elaborate.

The dwindling of available developable land puts intense pressure on land reserved as open space and on farmland, and was a major factor in some counties initiating more active land management measures, such as special taxes or urban growth boundaries. One county official where strict growth restrictions were in place reports, “We are literally running out of land.” Loss of open space and agriculture land was cited by six counties as a serious problem.

There are varied reasons for dwindling land, not all traceable to rapid growth. One county reports that 60 percent of its land is owned by federal or local government, immediately reducing availability. Another mentions the growth boundary drawn in their region, “Because we’ve adopted an urban growth boundary, we only have maybe four square miles of residential

inside the boundary that are vacant and these will be developed in the near future. Once those parcels are developed, then we are out of the urban growth development land. Then it will be up to the cities [to absorb the population].” For many counties, especially in the semi-arid west, water was the culprit, “Water – it will dictate growth, making it the most important issue.”

While for some counties dwindling land was the issue, for others dwindling farmland, not dwindling land, was a major concern. One deputy county executive says, “There are enormous pressures on the farmer when he’s got two kids. They want to know – where is there’s. Land is selling at \$50,000 an acre?) [Our] county has some of the best soils in the world. The farmland is exceptional.” The concept of highest use of the land conflicts with the best use of the land. Elsewhere other county officials sound this theme that agriculture is a good industry in the county but it is diminishing. Farm preservation is necessary. “Farmers are retiring – or moving to Iowa. Land is priced too high for new people to take up farming. \$5000 an acre is too high.”

For a large minority of the counties, shortages of developable land or loss of farmland are not an issue. A typical reply is, “We have sufficient property to keep prices down presently to affordable levels.” Speaking of their agricultural industry, one deputy county manager said, “[Our] county used to be 150,000 acres in citrus. In the 1980s we lost 110,000 acres of citrus [due to unforeseen disasters]. Much of our citrus industry has migrated to Brazil. All that land is now open to development – the development that comes with the expansion of [core city]. Groves where citrus trees died are now vacant land. Farmers are selling their properties. Before comprehensive plans were put into place, you saw these lands pre-platted in the 1920s as subdivisions. So rezoning in groves is not a problem. . . . Builders are building all over. . . . Up to \$140,000 is considered affordable. There is much housing available.”

Counties have addressed sprawl in many ways, from the more traditional in-fill projects and intergovernmental agreements to more radical growth boundaries and special districts. A county planning director in the West explains that the county commissioners realized the prior 20 year pattern of sprawl should and could not continue and recently adopted their Comprehensive Plan based on this. Other policies are coming in line with the comprehensive plan. “We did adopt an urban growth boundary, outside of which we won’t rezone from urban to rural density because the county can’t afford to provide the services with the property taxes they take in.” The planner also notes also that the “county is updating its zoning regulations to reflect this change.” “In [our] county, outside of the UGB the zoning is 20 acres per dwelling; we are considering going up to 35 acres, maybe even 80 acres, but we are also trying to promote clustering in key areas outside of the growth boundary as part of our comprehensive plan.”

A principal planner in the Midwest reports his county tried to use comprehensive planning, “We try to impact sprawl with zoning and subdivision, but the land use plan is the best policy document.”

A comprehensive plan is the basis of another policy approach, where variances on regulations to developers are allowed on infill and other projects. The county in the past year has created incentives for property owners to develop and utilize some areas that need commercial or residential revitalization. If the land in those areas does not need to be further subdivided, it wouldn’t be subject to the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance test.

Another official feels that their county once had “problems because of growth, but now we have intergovernmental agreements with the municipalities in the county, we have growth boundaries, and we have passed a sales tax that bought significant open space that is used to buffer communities. Rural preservation areas have been designated.” The official also reports

that municipal communities had accepted infill development, and that there was “an open space ethic and an environmental ethic that contributes to good transit systems and recycling efforts.”

A combination of community groups has helped push a Western county’s growth agenda. A county coordinating council works on the statewide Growth Management Act implementation. The county has involved the private sector and cooperated with the county Smart Growth Coalition. Since then the Coalition has had 7 local forums around the region on issues related to smart growth, such as open space. The Smart Growth Coalition put together 40 policies that all participants have agreed to. “Where it has broken down,” the official recounts, “is in how it [the Growth Management Act] is interpreted. The Hearings Board makes more specific rulings on what the legislation means. Then people say, ‘You’ve made a ruling that is too broad for me.’”

Some leaders did not describe the exact policy tool they use, but state their policy goals, “Where do we put all the people? Our growth plan tries to solve this. We put people into municipalities. It is a nodal plan of growth.”

Encouraging communities to develop through infill projects is not that easily achieved in a great many of the counties where this subject was raised. A Southern county has developers proposing infill projects in municipalities as one way to handle sprawl. The county manager describes a situation of extreme opposition, “As soon as infill hits the table, people go berserk.” He adds that the same people who were pushing density, the same people pushing to curb sprawl, are keeping infill development from occurring. Says an official from the West, “We always have problems with infill. Properties that have been zoned, if they are surrounded by people who are already living there, those people would rather the county buy the land for a park. They don’t want the land developed. As the county develops farther and farther out, it becomes harder and harder for infill projects to be approved.”

Some counties have the unique perspective of handling maturing neighborhoods while they oversee a healthy new growth rate. ‘We are getting it at both ends,’ is how one official describes it. “We still have a very healthy growth rate at one end but at the other we need more redevelopment and revitalization.”

The diversity of characteristics that threads through this group of counties shows up during a comparison of the percentages of incorporated, as compared to unincorporated, land in the counties. Of the nine counties that reference this subject, four have more than half their population in unincorporated territory, including those at 80 percent, 78 percent, 70 percent, and 60 percent. Far to the bottom of the unincorporated population percentage were the other counties, containing unincorporated populations of 12 percent, 11 percent, 3 percent, 0 percent, and 0 percent. Counties with low levels of unincorporated populations mention a couple reasons for their situations, including policies that encourage development within city limits or that urbanization has lasted for so long that their county simply became entirely urbanized. One county with a significant unincorporated population functioned as a municipal-services type of county to all parts of its territory, so that the distinction – in terms of service between incorporated and unincorporated territory – was of small importance.

Many of the county policies identified to this point in this report influence where and how and whether sprawl happens within the 37 counties under discussion.

Other examples include subdivision and zoning regulations. A Midwest county now requires subdivision plats on any division of land, a procedure that differs from past practice. A Western county planning director reports that land, in parcels outside their urban growth boundary that are above 35 acres in size, can be subdivided into smaller parcels out of reach of county control. “We can’t do a thing about it because under state law these large holdings are

exempt from subdivision law. This development style degrades the air quality, impacts schools, and affects roadways, and further they don't pay for their own services. The county only gets to review building permits, but has no authority." Holdings being developed that are under 35 acres are required by the county to go through subdivision law and can be taxed.

A county in the Far West that saw tremendous growth in the late-1960s passed their Guidelines for Orderly Development and established Sphere of Influence Boundaries. These policies placed major restraints on large-scale development and created self-contained cities that are growing outward. Levels of service designations are applied to parts of the county transportation infrastructure. Those that cannot absorb more growth, for example, are designated a level of service F, which means no more subdivisions can be approved in that area. "Almost every city has some kind of growth management plan. This is slowing acres of land consumption," the official reports.

Another county has developed adequate facilities testing as part of its Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. To insure that proposed development does not outpace existing public facilities, requests must go through adequate facilities testing. The limitations on capacity are placed at the school levels and another applies to roads as in the above example.

Growth boundaries

Though an earlier section covered containment of growth through urban services districts, a policy that reduces sprawl, a variant on this that is often linked to sprawl reduction efforts is the urban growth boundary. Counties in two states mention this land use tool as being required of cities within their states. Says a county executive there, "I believe strongly that the State Growth Management Act was absolutely needed. We would have greater problems with infrastructure and transportation if we did not have this act."

Special districts or taxes for open space preservation are very evident within county responses. Three counties discuss their successful efforts on bond referenda passage for open space acquisition and the slowing of growth. A fourth county mentions their plan for protection and preservation of natural areas that was to be financed by a proposed \$20 million referendum. "We've completed the plan, now it is up to the voters to spend tax dollars to support the plan." Three counties talk about taxes dedicated to funding open spaces acquisition, or additionally to rural or agricultural preservation areas. This includes dedication of half of one county's recordation tax to agricultural preservation; the other half goes to fund school construction. Politics in a third county are hampering efforts to achieve such an open space tax there. "We are the only county in the area that doesn't have an open space tax. But politically the commissioners are concerned." The county planning director mentions that one of the recently incorporated communities didn't provide for enough taxes to support their own services.

In the West, a county with a strong land management ethic has the Board and a committee seeking to establish an open space district for 2004. The county official asks, "Will they pay for conservation easements on the land? , , , The political will has to be there. They may be driven forward by the public on the ballot box. Many people are comfortable with that [open space district]."

Some counties have to handle sprawl through their intermediary cities and townships. The county planning department is helping smaller townships to lay out a plan for smart growth, starting with narrower roads into subdivisions to save land and so forth, one official says. Says another, "We try to share these [smart growth] practices with our local governments using meetings and training sessions."

Other counties strive for that elusive jobs-housing balance that they hope may reduce sprawl. Some have attained this: “We are very balanced with business—52/48 residential versus business and have been blessed here to have a balance and to have a very affluent community. We have been able to support growth and cut taxes at the same time. We have focused on growth and tried to attract business.” Others have a tenuous hold on this balance, saying “There is some risk of becoming a bedroom community.” Similarly from a New England county, “The real interest is in trying to find the balance to get more jobs in the county rather than just being bedroom community. The executive was elected on a smart growth platform – the opponent was more of an activist but it was the big issue. People blame new development for higher taxes each year.”

## **Schools**

Officials in five counties remark that overcrowded schools are a serious problem. Less frequently mentioned are problems building new schools or providing modular additions to existing schools. Four individuals mention schools or education without elaborating.

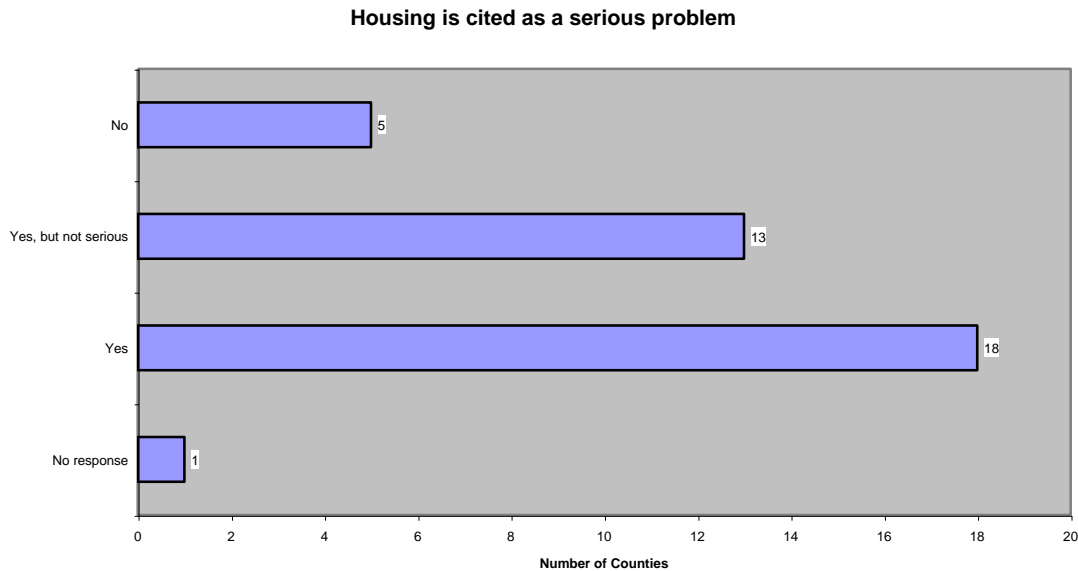
A Western county executive explains that their educational system needs attention and upgrading, that it needs double and triple size the current capacity. “When a student population has quadrupled in size in five years and you have classrooms in mobile trailers, there is no time for the administration or tools to develop that could handle the requirements of the urban-sized school.”

A Southern county official reports, “Our school system is very, very overcrowded. We use 800-900 mobile units. We need to build several new schools every school year. It is physically impossible to construct enough to eliminate the mobile units. That [mobile units] and traffic congestion are what people are most concerned about. This is what you hear about at all the public meetings.” A county mentioned earlier under infrastructure has used voluntary impact fees to gain traction against overcrowded schools, but with those monies it will still be eight to ten years before they are caught up with building schools. Another Southern county executive reports, “Yes, our schools are crowded, we’ve been adding trailers. We have a special sales tax for capital improvements to schools, and it was just extended another five years”

One growing county has an unusual arrangement whereby sales tax receipts help provide personal property tax relief. Of the 7 cents, 4 cents go to the state, 1 cent to transit, 1 cent to capital improvements to schools, and 1 cent for property tax relief. While this procedure provides a strong source of dedicated funds for school construction, the county official’s comments indicate that this taxation policy may overly influence county priorities. “This year, we will take in \$83 million, but with all the new homes, it will cost us \$91 million. We brought in enough to wipe out 86 percent of it [property tax], but the citizens are still complaining about paying any property taxes.” Usually the county pays off the taxes, but this particular year they only brought in 86 cents on the dollar, so property owners are having to pay 14 cents.”

## **Housing**

Housing as a problem issue is in the second tier of concerns voiced by county staff. Ten counties mention housing as one of the overall set of problems facing their communities. Asked specifically if housing is a serious problem in their county, 13 say “yes but not serious,” 18 say “yes,” and 5 say “no.” Only 16 percent of the counties respond that housing is not a problem in their communities. Many staff members, and their communities, translate public intervention in the housing market as meaning assistance for the very poor. This translation occurs despite interview questions carefully worded to apply to low or moderate wage working families.



In the Midwest, a county administrator says there is a housing problem, “primarily for low and moderate housing, yes. People working in various service industries have a difficult time living in this area. This problem puts more pressure on the transportation system. As a suburban county we don’t have much in the way of public transit. People with lower incomes have to commute further.” The concept reappears of the affordable housing stock as a falling “domino” that influences the need for new transportation patterns. On the East Coast, an administrator echoes this, “If you do not have available affordable housing, then people have to live outside the community. Then transportation gridlock happens, and air pollution also results.”

Another community in New England has a zero percent residential vacancy rate. The county official says, “Property values have increased astronomically . . . due to increase of people from [neighboring states] and limited space. There is no affordable housing.” Another New England community says the same thing. “Yes, affordable housing is very serious – to the extent that we are entering a real point of having a jobs-housing imbalance. We are becoming very affluent.” He reports that, for professionals, it is often difficult to buy in the county. Those holding entry level jobs cannot afford it. Wealthy communities price out affordable housing. As a Midwest official observes, “In this county, with the wealth, it puts a lot of pressure on the other end of the scale. On my staff, I have planners that live in a neighboring county, an hour away. We’re pushing these people away.”

Lack of land or wealth in a community does not always emerge as the problem with affordable housing provision. “The big gorilla here,” says one, “is that the sole source of funding for schools is the local property tax. There is no sales or state income tax. There is no incentive for apartments because they will be a breeding ground for children and need for more services. This will be an incredible new expense . . . Unless they find a new solution to education funding, we will continue to have a natural disincentive to provide affordable housing.”

Communities harbor many problems under the umbrella of the shortage of affordable housing. Only one housing problem emerges as a standout issue, that of “housing affordability in general” which 26 county leaders mention. No other housing problem was mentioned more than three times (such as not enough lots or maintaining older housing).

One community mentions their lack of affordable housing which includes a lack of transitional housing for people coming back from mental institutions, the justice system, or disabilities. He adds that, “Many second homes are being built which is a waste of resources and takes away from land use for other purposes.”

When the issue narrows to concerns about housing affordability for low or moderate wage working families, 22 respond that it is a problem, 7 say no, and 7 offer that it is “somewhere in between.” Again, only one housing affordability problem is on the minds of most of the officials, “lack of affordable units” which 26 again mention. Some of the lesser mentioned problems, none mentioned more than four times, include inadequate zoning policies or trouble dispersing affordable housing.

A West Coast county, where affordable housing has been an acute problem, has officials asking, “Where do you provide low and moderate housing when \$350,000 is the average price of a home? . . . We are not providing housing for our farm workers. There can be 30-40 people to one house . . . There is low, very low availability of housing, even for fireman and police.” Unique installations or situations in communities can reduce available land and tighten housing prices. Another Western County official reports, that the “[business] concern is the ability to retain employees and have affordable housing in the area. Most of housing in the Southeast corridor is not that affordable – school teachers, clerical, administrative and the like have a difficult time finding affordable housing. The county also has an airport, so you can’t mix housing with the airport. It is difficult to find a location for affordable housing.”

In the West, another county reports higher prices and an environmental issue, “Housing affordability is a huge issue. It is hard to live and work in the county. The average price of a house is \$247,000 . . . We also have regional considerations that impact housing affordability because we have an endangered species listing in the coho salmon – the only listing in a metropolitan area. It has caused some impact in land availability. It requires setbacks from salmon bearing streams. This has had a significant impact as well on agricultural land.” A Midwest county has the same problem, “Environment concerns are a high priority in this county. We have unique features, geological features, unique species. [This] is the edge of the glacier, it’s as far as it went, so there are unique plants and animals. We have 2 class A streams, unusual in [a large metropolitan area in the Midwest].

Another county has land reduce by public ownership of much of their land. “The national pattern is that people aren’t living near their jobs . . . Demand is really high, and especially for people who don’t work regular jobs and can live anywhere, they choose to live here. The need to preserve open space brings up demand. Sixty percent of the county is owned by the federal and local government.”

Developmental procedures can make affordable housing provision difficult. In the Far West, a county commissioner explains, “Another concern with growth is that now in [our state] any new annexation of land has to be voted on by the citizens. The only annexations being approved by the voters are those annexations where higher end housing is being built on the land being voted on for annexation. This pushes up housing costs as well.”

The lack of affordable housing in a Midwest county represents problems for the elderly and “problems for employment. People who work here cannot afford the housing. This includes essential workers – police, fire, and teachers. Also elderly people can’t pay property taxes or maintain their homes – they have to move out of the county.” Elsewhere, in the South, there is a similar pattern, as a contact explains, “The county is losing seniors to planned communities in other areas.”

One official thoughtfully discusses “the question of affordable housing and how we grapple with it. Immigrant people with limited resources are moving here. They are drawn by the same things that draw others – good schools and hope for a decent job . . . How do we provide housing that is affordable? We don’t have an answer yet. We’re looking for one!”

An assessment about their affordable housing comes from a colleague in a Western county, “The cost of housing is a problem. Our housing costs are not as high as some parts of the region, but it is high relative to where it has been. The need for affordable housing has grown, and there is no consensus in the county about what to do about it, or even as to what causes it. Some people might blame the growth boundaries as reducing the supply of land, but it is not just necessarily less land. There are other pressures.”

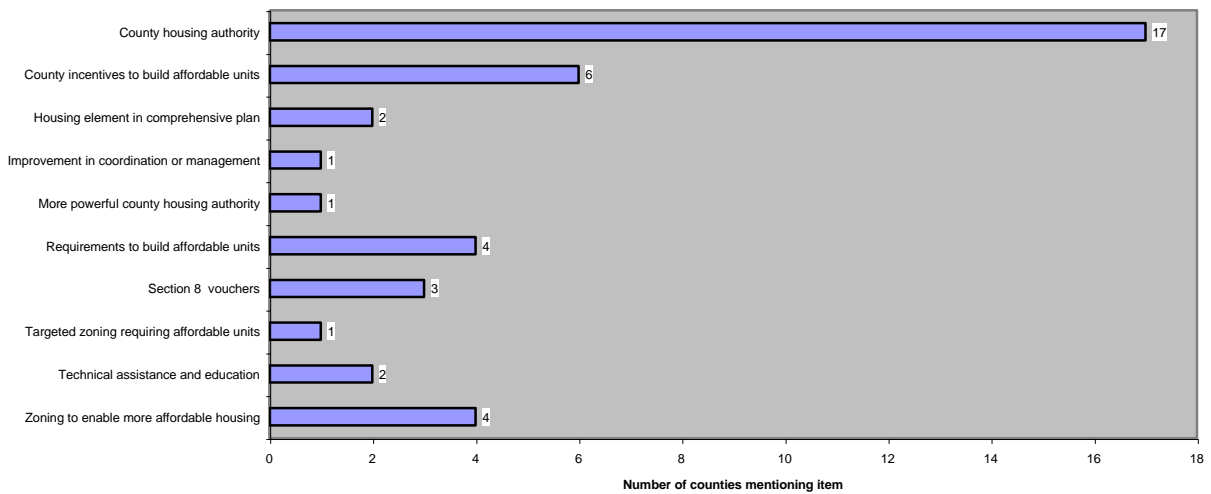
“Affordable housing advocates would say, yes, there is serious problem,” another official remarks. But he believes that, “if you really examine the problem, the price of land is very expensive, and there are not a lot of large tracts left to develop.”

The higher housing unit density needed to reduce housing costs is an issue in more rural counties. “People see it [the county] as rural, but to continue to allow growth, we have to have higher density,” a Western county official recounts. She notes that county residents do not want to see higher density development and there have been significant protests.” “The perception is that more dense development is for cities,” an official from a more rural Midwest county notes, its usage in the county would be seen by some as “almost a threat to a rural way of life . . . creeping urbanism.”

The policies on affordable housing in the absence of a developer’s involvement are few and are voluntary. When they are queried about the types of policies or activities in place to address affordability problems, 29 county respondents say they have such entities. The majority say it is the county housing authority (17 mention this), and a distant second group (6 cite this) mention county incentives to build affordable units (density bonus, general fund dollars, etc.).



Tools to initiate affordable housing



In the West, counties cite a business partnership that is promoting affordable housing and a local community advocating affordable housing. “One of the communities that will have an updated plan, surprisingly enough, was saying they need affordable housing in [their community]. If they can convince others, then the county will put something in the plan and do their darndest to see that it happens. The community develops the plan, and if it’s in there, the county will do their best to make it happen.”

The county chair of a Southern county mentions they have collaborative agreements with their nonprofits, “You can justify using nonprofits if they accomplish or address issues that the community should be addressing.” A New England county reports a similar arrangement.

One county in the Midwest believes they have taken a huge step on affordable housing provision, having created a housing authority that has community development powers. The county board started a pilot project, taking one million dollars out of general fund and putting it into a HOPE fund-housing fund. It is leveraged with other state, regional, and federal money, to support affordable housing projects. The fund has addressed housing for families and seniors, and for people who fall thru the cracks such as mentally challenged adults

A final group of counties have begun community outreach efforts on affordable housing. A New England community has instituted a “region wide housing task force that is trying to get banking, local land use planning officials, etc. to get a better understanding of what the present policies create and to overcome disincentives.” Another reports, “We have a committee that is working on it [developers doing affordable housing] . . . We have neighborhood community meetings on affordable housing, and we talk to people in advance of announcing plans for something. We talk to city council and are very open about plans and what we think is good for that part of the community and the community at large. We will bring in a police chief who is familiar with statistics to show that crime goes down, it’s not a burden for police dept, etc. Because there are more residents in the neighborhood from the additional housing, the neighborhood has less crime because everyone is looking out for each other. This helps put the community at ease.”

One county takes the opposite approach, “We operate in a stealth-like manner to accomplish it. No one knows it’s there.” They have a five percent moderate housing set aside.

A few of the counties have the reverse situation of plenty of available affordable housing. These counties are those that are near or contain the core city, those on the far edge of the metropolitan area, or those with unique circumstances.

## **Environment and pollution**

Air pollution as a problem and sewer/storm drainage pollution problems have each been cited three times by those interviewed. The general concept of environment and pollution, water pollution, environmental restrictions that reduce available land, and recreational usage that pressures the environment have been mentioned once each.

Responsibility for the environment may mean overseeing the private sector’s developments. One county official told of fielding an angry complaint about a new cell tower in a neighborhood known for verdant landscapes. “The caller is complaining and yells, ‘I can see it from my back porch!’ I think of where she might be standing, so I ask where she is calling from. She was calling from a cell phone.”

A few county officials do discuss the conflicts of growth and preservation of a county’s natural environment. In the Midwest, one official mentions that, “We have wetlands that are placed in direct conflict with growth.” A county in the South reports that the state program addressing areas of critical concern has helped protect a springhead within a neighboring county that affects lakes and rivers where he is. Another county in the West has worked to complete a shorelands plan now being adopted by 5 counties and their cities, and is releasing a hillside plan, that will keep development from encroaching in these two sensitive areas.

Counties that rely mostly on wells mention efforts to maintain an adequate drinking water supply by protecting the groundwater.

## **State responses to rapid growth**

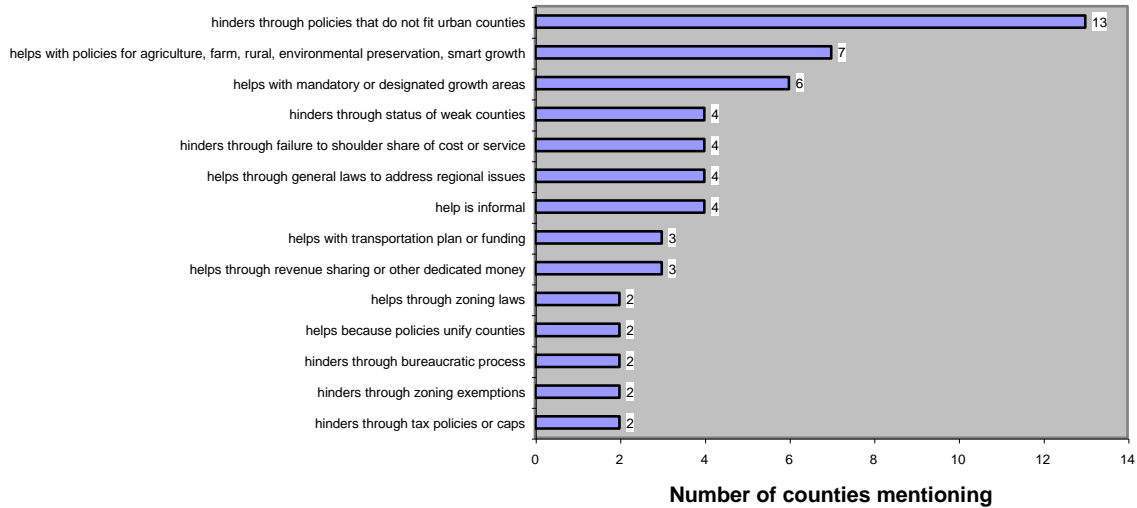
State laws, administrative regulations, and financial support affect local efforts to address rapid growth. Local officials made suggestions on their state’s role and impact at the local level. Their remarks focus upon five themes, the lack of policies, unsuitable policies, the fiscal impact of policies, beneficial policies, and authority bestowed to counties.

Opinions on the value of state policies to county growth management efforts are very divided. Among the 37 responding counties, 9 say the state policies provide assistance, 12 say they hinder county efforts, 12 say they both help and hinder, and 1 says they do not influence, while 3 did not respond. Most often mentioned as a hindrance is state policies that do not fit urban counties. mentioned 13 times. All other concerns were much more infrequent, beginning with two mentioned four times, indicating that the state hinders county efforts through failure to shoulder its share of costs or services and that the state hinders through status of weak counties.

Some officials are very blunt in their remarks about their state’s policy assistance. Of greatest assistance, mentioned 7 times, is state help with policies for agriculture, farm, rural, or

environmental preservation or smart growth efforts. Six individuals noted state support of mandatory or designated growth areas.

**Opinions on state assistance on growth to counties**



“There is a serious lack of state policy relating to land use issues and growth,” according to an administrator in a Western state. “We are supposed to be required by state every five years to update the housing element of our general plan. The state hasn’t required it recently, but we are now [in 2002] working on the ’92 plan update.” A similar refrain came from a colleague in the Midwest, “The state doesn’t really have policies that have helped [our] County. Each county is more or less on its own. If you want rapid growth, then that is up to you. The state hasn’t done anything to hinder it.”

Two respondents from different counties in a Southern state provide parallel comments. “The state hinders somewhat. Our tool box isn’t as full as it could be.” The respondent mentions tax increment financing and state mandated planning from regional perspective as two tools he would like to see. “It is hard to do regional planning. The bottom line for localities? ‘I look at my own constituents.’” His peer in a neighboring county has very similar sentiments, “I’d almost count the state as irrelevant, maybe even more of a hindrance. I’m only sort of kidding. There was a statewide growth management task force a few years ago. It just disappeared . . . I think the state could do a whole lot more. There are no incentives to do regional stuff.”

Some of those in urban counties in the Midwest provide reminders on the accommodations that must be made during growth policy decisions. An administrator observes that rural interests are stronger in the legislature than urban interests, thus “state involvement for planning in [our state] is of little help. There is a Land Use Planning Resource Act, and the state gives funds for any county adopting under the Act. But there have been no appropriations yet to initiate the program.” It’s a similar issue for a Western county, where the tax code hinders county government because the county has no authority to raise taxes without the authority of

state. “Taxes aren’t adequate but the state legislature is dominated by non-urban counties,” the administrator explains. “Highly urban interests receive little attention. Urban county governments are struggling because the taxes can’t support the urbanization of counties – they are providing urban services without tax bases.”

Others mention, “We are seeing state government getting more involved in matters that are supposed to be the prerogative of local government – land use decisions. For example, the mobile home industry has been successful in getting [our state] to pass legislation to dictate how local governments have to accommodate mobile home units. The homebuilders association is getting the state to require cluster provisions in zoning ordinances . . . The state is micromanaging.”

The states struggle with drafting general policies for a diverse set of counties, and local officials find the results cumbersome. “There is a problem that is more magnified in [our state] than in other states. The state, in having to deal with all local governments, they are forced to create a policy that hits at the middle. Our county’s needs are not being met by ‘the general.’ But we see their [the state’s] position as well . . . There are [more than 100] counties. Most are [not like ours]. Growth is the last thing that they have seen in a long, long time. So we usually are just saying to the state, ‘Don’t get in our way.’” The county has been able to “help ourselves in our relationship with the state because we’ve been able to juggle our agenda to match the state’s at any given point, and down the road the state will juggle theirs to assist the county. Our relationship with the state is not adversarial.”

An administrator in a nearby state echoes his colleague’s remark: “State policies will unify counties and move the counties to prioritize in the same way . . . State policy does not always fit our policy.” Another urban county administrator agrees, “The state doesn’t have much influence on our growth. We are an anomaly for [our state] and are treated as such. We are urban-type, mostly suburban, and provide 20-25 percent of state revenue . . . [Most of the] rest of state is totally rural – most of what goes on in the state legislature doesn’t usually affect us. Taxing policy does affect us because we have more people, but it’s not terribly noticeable.”

## Fiscal policies

The chief fiscal issue that appears in county officials comments is “the problem of unfunded state mandates.” At least five officials mention that if the state makes a mandate for a program and provides funds, only to subsequently withdraw the money, the county may have to cut from elsewhere such as infrastructure provision to maintain corrections or mental health facilities. Concerns about tax laws’ affects upon affordable housing provision also were raised.

## Beneficial policies

Local county officials attitudes towards their states’ growth and housing policies included supportive comments.

A Southern state official praised growth management, agricultural preservation, storm water management regulations, and state planning/enabling legislation that mandates that they update their general development plan. “The state is fostering good land use planning followed by good implementation tools,” he concludes. “The state does help . . . We are lucky to be in a state that is at the forefront on this.”

“State policies support what [our county] is already doing,” reports another, “so it is a help.” Two other administrators mention state open space preservation/growth management programs as having benefits for their counties. A Midwest official cites the state’s economic

development program that takes money out of taxes to pay for infrastructure, or tax increment financing. “We are dedicating those taxes for capital expenditures. We are trying to ensure that instead of having a windfall, we putting it into capital investment.”

Many county respondents mention that the state does not permit counties to have much impact upon growth. Typical of such comments is one from an individual in a Southern location, “We have a very traditional – read conservative – General Assembly when it comes to zoning and land use. Dillon’s Rule, that the county can only exercise authority specifically delegated to it by the state, is in effect.” The official explains that this means the tools they have available are limited to what is available through the state code. He continues, “We don’t have a whole lot of opportunities, options, or authority that are available to other local governments in other parts of the country.”

Another administrator gave similar details, “The scales are tipped heavily to municipalities. Municipalities can annex what they want. Also within 1.5 miles around their boundary, they can object to subdivision plans. The city must sign off on plotted subdivisions in the 1.5 miles around their boundaries. And the city can force zoning with a three-fourths vote at county level . . . The state statutes favor municipalities to plan and zone and subdivide. The sad thing is that we are the only one that is looking regionally at the big picture. It is essential to meaningful planning. It affects us, by virtue of the power that municipalities have and in ways we don’t anticipate. An example involves one of our municipalities . . . They were handing out building permits left and right. When they slowed down their effort, we actually saw our county growth rate slow down.”

No other explanatory comment was heard as frequently as this explanation for county inability to oversee rapid growth. A typical ten comments include:

“We cannot control land.”

”We can’t control growth in the 14 cities. Counties can’t control annexation. We only can sue to stop.”

“The scales are tipped heavily to municipalities.”

“Our growth – our population increase – is not serious, but we can’t stop it.”

“The county does not have control over land use. But we have control over a lot of the infrastructure. We do what is needed.”

“[Our county] is unique in that we do not have land use authority in the county. Cities have all of their own land use authority.”

“The land use decisions are made town by town . . . There is nothing in state law requiring certain decisions or for cities or towns to follow it. The county only really provides technical assistance for communities.”

“Within our county we have 13 townships and 6 cities. We have created an organization for land use coordination, but nothing is binding.”

“Land use in [our state] is done by local government. We have no control over that.”

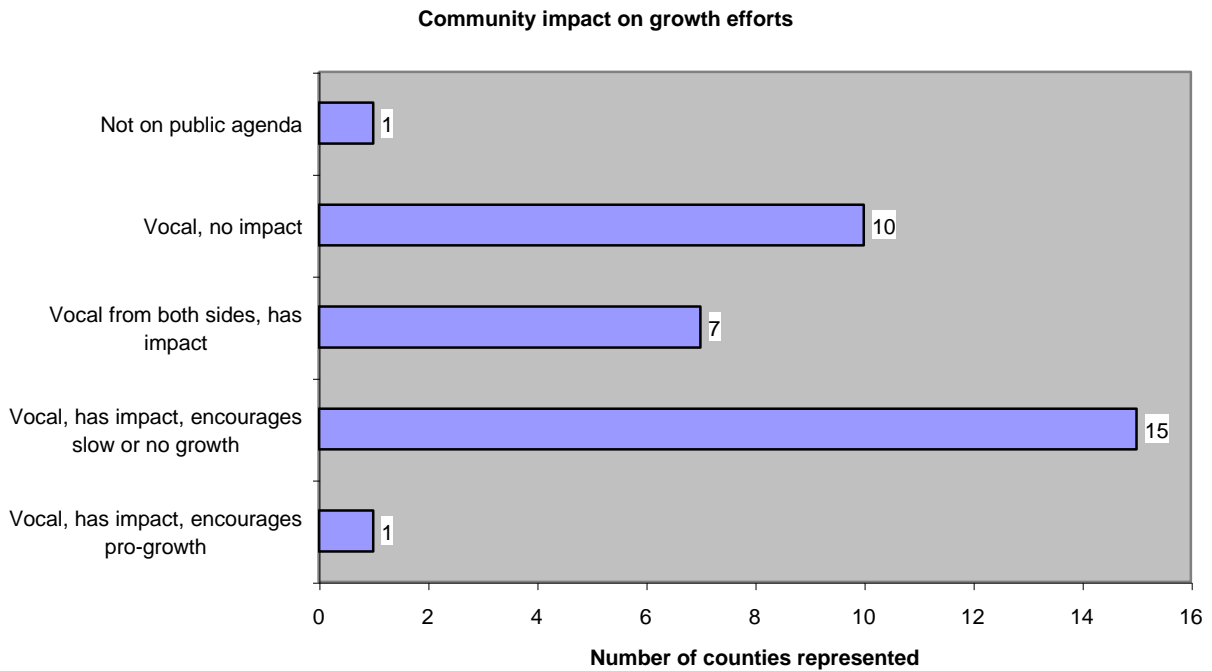
“The county is advisory only. With the boroughs and townships, there are 300-350 elected officials making decisions. If a municipality has a land use plan, it supercedes the county’s plan.”

## **Local citizen responses to rapid growth**

In 27 percent of the counties contacted, the citizen activism does not influence county efforts on growth management, and in about 40 percent citizen involvement works to encourage a slow or no-growth county policy. Two New England responses were, “Mostly people are opposed to growth – the state in general doesn’t like development. People will try to limit it.” Also, “From a local perspective, it is almost uniformly believed that growth is bad. Citizens want to stop development.” From elsewhere came this observation, “The community is very supportive of growth control . . . there is not significant opposition. Most hold a similar ethic that growth should be controlled. There is new development, but it is infill and in cities . . . a lot of growth there.”

Community groups in some counties seek short-term impact, and the factions rally against or for individual projects. This can create a community without a clear consensus. This community schism is “reflected among our elected leadership,” explains an administrator from the South. “There is not a political consensus to use some of the tools for smart growth . . . This is a polarized issue among those who are vocal on both sides.” He suggests that the county needs to end somewhere in the middle. Property rights are a fundamental quality of life. That clashes with those who are opposed to growth.

In some counties, they may adopt a longer-range agenda as they work to influence the county’s broader framework for growth.



A few counties are exceptionally pro-active on bringing citizens into the policy-setting process, as an official from one such county explains, “Being that we deal with growth with our community plans, and they are developed by committees of members of the community, community support is pretty much essential,”

Citizen input has altered during the past quarter century, according to a county administrator, and their county's interaction with citizen activism has evolved in response. "There is no doubt that the rezoning issue is a totally different atmosphere now than 20 years ago." She explains that in her county 20 years ago, there was seldom any opposition, but in the mid-1980s, a disorganized opposition began. In the 1990s, opposition became more organized. She says, "Homeowner and neighborhood associations came to the meetings with logical and rational reasons to oppose changes, not emotional ones. Now developers work with the communities. There is a give and take between them as the process moves forward." As a result she says, "We bend over backwards to look for new ways for public input."

Within this county, all plans have citizen groups: A committee examining revitalization and growth issues, impaneled to meet for a year, have extended that "going on 2 ½ years now. They excuse this by explaining that the more they studied the issue, the more they realized there was much to learn." Approximately half a dozen years ago the county expanded public participation in county planning and programs. "A high percentage of our population is computer literate. We are still working on how to make the best use of the internet. The website was redesigned towards increasing public involvement. We are presently working on the design of a lot more interactive activity through the computer. We thought more counties would be far along on this. We've been looking for them, but we seem to be running out front this."

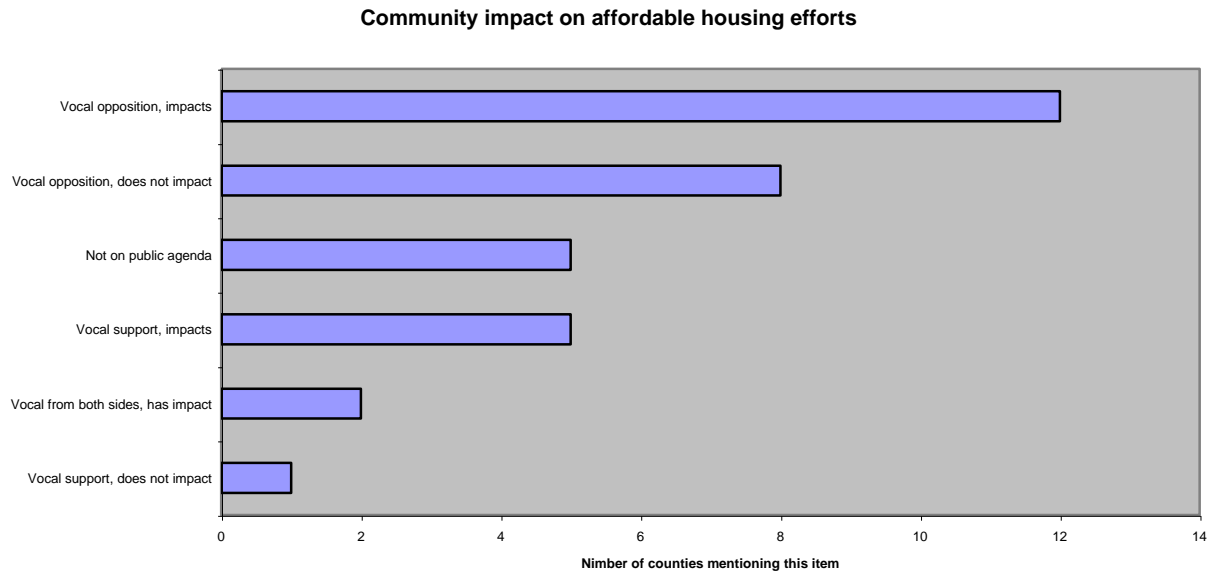
The involvement of citizens in the decisions that will shape the county's future has difficulties beyond the technical outreach. "That's an interesting two-edged sword," one county official has termed this process. "As much as I support and embrace outreach efforts to convey to the community the full information on what we're grappling with . . . that same information can be used to support or oppose it." He notes that is much staff effort involved for something that can rebound in unpredictable ways. "We say we have to have road improvements," he explains, but such a statement "can be turned around and used against you. If roads are inadequate, why are you supporting development? Why improve the roads and why not shut down development. Everyone has to be conscious of the fact that some development is good." He concludes that the county undertakes an ongoing effort to reach out to and educate the entire citizenry as to the land use implications of halting development. Some means of access promoted by the county include public notices in newspapers and mailed out to 750 civic organizations, website announcements, computer email, fax, and phone. "Anything we can do to get information out and, conversely, in, we will do that. It is ongoing and costly. We want to improve on our use of the computer. . . A high percentage of our citizens are online and can access [our website]. There's a mindset in this county to make it an open process. Citizens are encouraged to participate and be part of solution."

The internet as a participation tool is mentioned again by another county as being used more than they ever have been used to post agendas for meetings or staff reports that can be downloaded on zoning requests.

An official in a Southern state mentions changing demographics as factoring into their county's decision to invest more in an online approach. "A lot of the residents are extremely involved in their careers and they just don't have the time to deal with these issues. Their extra time is with their families. . . We have been trying to find better ways of informing and involving citizens. It's always a challenge to get people interested. We have to find better ways such as the internet. More information helps people understand what's going on. It answers their questions. In some cases, we provide information by which they oppose a project. But overall it is beneficial. This all helps people understand what is going on; it lessens opposition."

The two-edged sword is a common phenomenon, according to comments received. “For the most part, citizens oppose some things we actually want to promote as far as commercial and for tax base. They get upset with county for not putting in a bunch of roads to deal with growth. The county just does not have enough resources to support the infrastructure,” a Western official observes.

A third of the counties report that community opposition to efforts to meet housing affordability needs impacts those efforts. Between a fourth and a fifth indicate that community opposition is vocal but does not impact.



Other counties report using county-wide telephone surveys every two years with a core set of questions that are tracked to catch any issues that may be developing. Also used for public opinion are focus groups in addition to the traditional meetings.

## Local political support

Because growth issues require community choices, they often make their way into the political arena. A number of counties report, as does this administrator in the South, “The anti-growth issue was a big one in the last election and will be in the next election.” Says another, “We have a very Republican Board of Commissioners, but they don’t want to over regulate, so they leave growth up to market.” From the East Coast comes this comment, “Anything with density or large scale projects are increasingly met with neighborhood opposition. We haven’t gotten to the point where growth opposition is winning elections, but we are almost there. The mayor won by only three votes.” A similar election situation is reported on the West Coast, “What we’ve got regarding growth is a lack of consensus about how they [the county residents] feel about growth. A city council member ran on a platform to stop all growth. That contingent got swept out of office in our elections last month. Growth is a perceived problem because the government can’t handle it for the moment. People may not want growth. But they need to do



the math. The math is that new growth is needed for revenues. The public perception is beginning to catch up - we need growth for the economy.”

It is a complicated seat for elected officials to occupy, because their staff’s views may not represent constituent views, as one administrator explains, “Sometimes our elected officials give in to the community instead of looking to professional expertise and community good.”

Political friction appears between local efforts on growth and a state’s response to growth. In general, says an official, “our interests line up with the other larger suburban counties.” It is a partisan situation as well. “The Democrats are in [the core city] and state house . . . .The suburban counties are Republican. We’ve built a crosswalk with the Democrats.” She explains that many long years ago “we were once good southern Democrats . . . .Thus the urbanized suburban counties are able to work with the legislature when needed.” One more angle from another official reflects local political attitudes as well, “The commissioners kind of resent another body telling them what to do. But they understand that county doesn’t have the resources to continue to allow sprawl the way it has been in the last twenty years.”

The rift between conservative suburban counties and core cities was a theme of numerous conversations. Some speak of this relationship using words such as adversarial and cited lawsuits involved in community decisions such as extensions of highways.

## **Local fiscal support**

Some counties have the fiscal capacity to finance tools needed to manage rapid growth. The county practicing cohesive urban management is one. The county official says, “The residents are willing to pay to maintain our quality of life. It is a relatively wealthy community . . . . We began as a bedroom community after WWII and have continued to flourish as a result of good schools, great law enforcement, highly-educated residents, low crime rates, and high per capita income. We are willing to spend reasonable amts of money to keep services up.”

Others mention that their local resources are not enough to finance growth. States without income taxes have to rely on local and federal sources for their growth management efforts. Some counties have a citizen preference for very low taxes, whether from a strong community ethic or due to less available income, and have limited local resources to handle rapid growth. Individuals accept the problems attendant with rapid growth, since the alternative is higher taxes.

Some counties have been impacted by tax caps. Statewide passage of two property tax caps in the 1990s and the voters’ continued reluctance to support taxes have handicapped a county’s ability in that state to respond to the impacts of growth, an official explains.

## **Role of developers in housing affordability**

A planning director in a West Coast area where housing has become expensive provides a concise assessment of the difficulty surrounding private market delivery of affordable housing. “The problem here is a lack of developers building those types of units. There is less profit involved in these homes. If there weren’t such a market for more expensive homes they might build more affordable ones, but the profit is just too high on expensive homes for them to want to

build cheaper homes. It would help if our county could provide density bonuses, mandatory inclusion of very low income housing, fee waiver programs, expedited processing, ordinances to prohibit construction of single family homes on land designated for multi-family use. We are looking at these options as we update the housing element of our general plan . . . If the county can provide all of the above, hopefully there will be enough incentive for developers to provide it.” The planning director notes that the county also has a standing contract with an affordable housing developer, so, if there is land, they can immediately go to this group to avoid a long bid process.

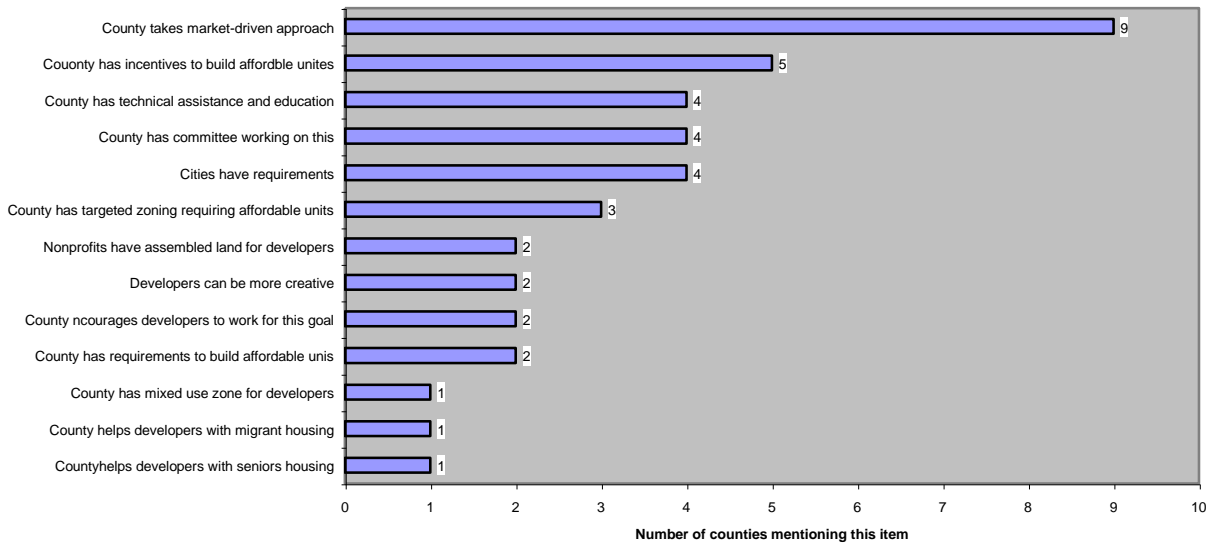
Many of the discussions on affordable housing were practical in their acknowledgement of market forces as a disincentive to affordable housing.

Two Midwesterners provide similar comments. One recounts, “To get the developers to build on a 5000 square lot, what would be in it for them? And how do you keep it affordable? Home owners want their values to appreciate. What happens if you go in and offer a subsidy? How do you maintain it as an affordable stock? You have to keep redoing it [the stock elsewhere], because everyone wants their house to appreciate. Do you defer on the profit to those houses [that have been built at an affordable price]? What would the owners say?” Another, a county manager, is equally forceful, “There has to be willingness on the part of developer to be a community and civic-minded company, and this has to be combined with ascertain incentive to do that. Some developers are willing to build affordable housing if the county will do something for them. We have a few like that but not very many because they can build a mansion and the margin is much higher, without paperwork, extra costs, and other stuff you have to go through. The county needs a package of incentives. If the county had better mass transportation system, we could have corridors of development identified for bus routes where these homes should be built. That then makes building affordable housing more of a market decision to the developers, which is what they operate on.”

“We are market driven right now,” a Western county mentions. “Our problem here is that if we let them build [affordable housing] without following certain regulations [so that price can be less], those savings are not necessarily passed along to the consumer, because when there is a development across the street, the guy [who is supposed to be] making the cuts will jack his price up close to the other guy. He will generate the profit from the cuts. So that is not a solution.”

Nine counties mention that their county uses a market-driven strategy to provide affordable housing. Next most frequently cited are counties where respondents say their county has incentives to build affordable units.

### County actions to encourage private developers' help with affordable housing



Respondents discuss density bonuses as mechanisms to drive private-sector provision of affordable housing. One supervisor reports use of “some bonus type programs. Higher zoning is permitted if you come in with lower income housing.” The problem here was that by the time the developer completed the process, market escalation had turned what should have been lower income housing into moderate income housing. Even when available, density bonuses might not be used, “We have had a zoning density for planned development since 2000, but we haven’t had anyone use it yet.” Several additional communities brought up density bonuses.

There is not consensus on the utility of density bonuses among practitioners.

In the East, a county executive staff member explains, “Density bonuses can be more negative than positive. It creates a higher density, and people don’t like that. Here in our county, it would have to be done as an exception to our Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. If you increase your affordable housing an extra notch, but in so doing that, you strain your infrastructure beyond the capacity that you had set, then you have not gained.” Through the alignment of circumstances and policy, they have been able to implement a requirement of developers of a five percent moderate housing add-on as “the price the builder has to pay, [and] then they’ll do it so that they can build.” A southern community in the East has a similar opinion, “Incentives are not all that good to make it happen. The way it happens is to make it a requirement such as inclusionary zoning. Density bonuses is not it.” Another East Coast county staffer says, “[Our state] zones for land use, not for people, not for income. The only thing the community can control is density. In prosperous communities, developers want to build for the upscale market if the density is higher, not for the lower end, such as building luxury condos. These [density] policies have backfired. It is possible to build for the lower end. I am not sure what it would take – probably some money. I would like to know.”

Mixed use development is another option that respondents mention, though this option is not available in quite a few counties according to respondents’ comments. Another East Coast county has a comprehensive policy for mixed use zones for higher density residential units per

acre and with commercial which they have adopted in their zoning ordinance. “We want to have employment within walking distance. We have four of these and are taking the necessary steps to implement them. We are looking to put it on the map with the comprehensive small area plan initiative. We will target specific properties. These will be in close proximity to rail stations and major highway intersections.”

A Southern county has such a policy under study. They have a mixed use ordinance under review by a stakeholders group. Presently they do not let residential units go above a commercial development. “We deal with this now for developers by breaking up the development site into smaller parcel lots of different zoning codes. We hope to increase the affordable housing supply through redevelopment rather than green development. We want to turn an old development over into a new type of development.” The zoning ordinance will allow higher density. They hope that the market is there, and that developers will entertain those provisions. “How do we provide housing that is affordable? We don’t have an answer yet. We’re looking for one!”

Another approach is to use federal tax credits. A Southern county mentions seven older multifamily developments that used federal tax credits in the last year. “The county was very involved in these tax credit applications; we want to make sure we get the best possible project in exchange for their support for the tax credit application. Word is getting out to developers.” In the Midwest, a county administrator says, “Primarily we have looked at tax credits and we find that a number of developers need help navigating the complexity of receiving them. They are used but have to put a lot of time and effort into helping developers navigate the bureaucracy.” In another Midwest state, the official understands that the red tape the developers have to go through to obtain money discourages it. “That is the big hindrance.” Financing in general has helped substantially in getting private sector interested in a New England state.

The housing element in their comprehensive plan has helped a Southern county. “But it is not on our priority list . . . We have a disproportionate share of housing below \$100,000 in the region. Our problem is that we have too much housing.”

There is an effort in a New England county to get land use planners and developers together at the table, to discuss what might make builders want to build affordable.

Others are asking developers to be more creative in their design practices. “They can be more creative with lot sizes, access, or public transit access.”

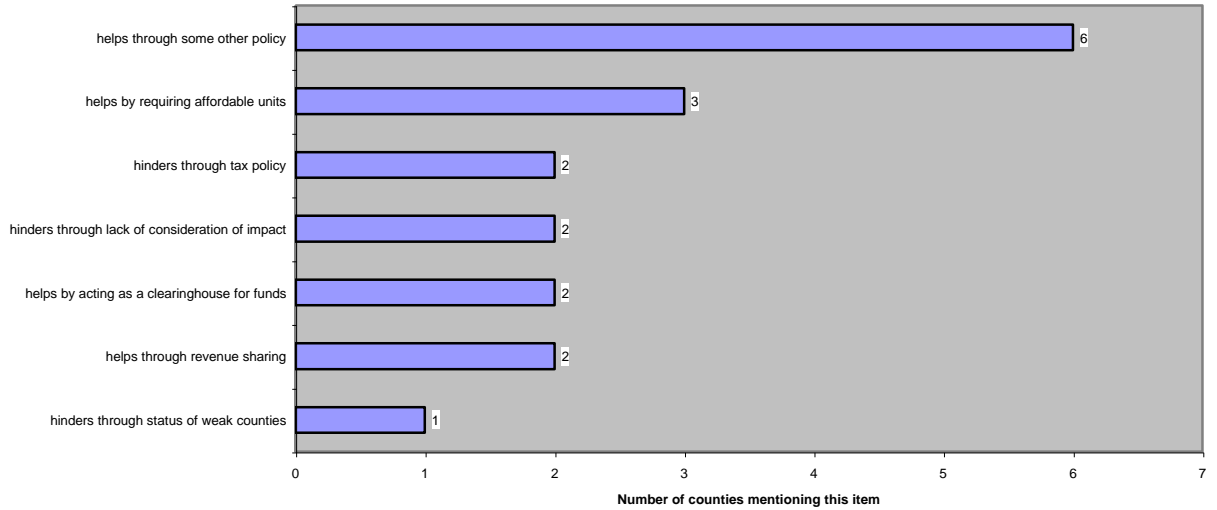
## **Role of the state or federal government in housing affordability**

When interviewers query on the subject of intergovernmental assistance in the provision of affordable housing to low and moderate wage working families, respondents have been very opinionated.

“The federal and state governments have a failure to recognize we are the ground level delivery for their efforts.” Numerous officials explain there is a lack of consideration for the impacts of state policies on growth. “To the extent that theirs is a leadership of high standards,” says one official on the West Coast, “there seems to be a failure to linking it on the ground.”

Views are split on state assistance; 14 indicate that the state has helped them, 12 note that the state neither helps nor hinders, 5 mention that the state has been a hindrance, and 6 did not respond.

Opinions on state policy assistance to counties on affordable housing



Many counties mentioned CDBG, Section 8, and federal mortgage programs. “Federal mortgage programs have really subsidized the market for a long time and they continue to do so. If they would make it even sweeter, it would be even more affordable.”

States that have taken a more active role do not always avoid criticism. An official says of the state role, “It is a hindrance. It doesn’t mesh with everything. They have punished low income for rich communities. There needs to be a summit on this. They are solving a symptom by hammering on the jurisdictions with the symptoms.”

Another Western official, a county planning director, explains, “I am not aware of any state programs. The state isn’t beating down my door asking for affordable housing.” There’s a similar assessment of a Southern state, “The state has not played a very big role in the housing affordability picture. They had to pass the authorizing legislation to establish the housing authorities, but that’s it.” A Midwest official has those same words for his state’s assistance, as does a New Englander, “The state encourages towns not to use zoning in an exclusionary way and that should be a goal. But these are just words. It doesn’t really help or hurt. It just doesn’t do much at all.”

Positive views from two Western officials mention state bonds for affordable housing and a state housing trust fund. In the West, a state with a growth management act requires localities to have an economic policy and affordable housing policy in place . . . Law is on the county side. In the East, a fair housing law and incentives to live close to work are noted.

## Local responses to housing affordability

The picture for acceptance of affordable housing is one of opposition to most projects. Several officials in Western counties sound common themes. The planning director of one describes his community’s response: “The community can certainly slow things down – we have had legal challenges on the last two projects – we were sued. It makes it undesirable for builders

to become involved in such projects.” He continues, “We do have situations where opposition has stalled or significantly changed projects.” Another Westerner reports a similar response, “It is a mixed bag, depending on where you are. Those in the rural areas with lesser incomes want affordability. Those in the higher income areas don’t want ‘those people’ around them.” Yet a third regional colleague agrees, “Community opposition to affordable housing always has a negative impact. Even if a community has the political power to get these things done, it’s never to the extent that they had hoped for. It gets whittled down.” He continues, “The active involvement of the neighborhood and homeowners associations has changed this. People move in, and then they say: ‘The houses built after mine, I want all to be larger and more valuable than mine.’” “People only want bigger or more expensive housing built next to them.”

Another concern with growth in a Western state is that there any new annexation of land to a city has to be voted on by the citizens. The only ones citizens are approving are those annexations where higher end housing is being built. “This means the other individuals [of more moderate means] have to live outside of [the city] and drive 30, 40, 50 miles to work and then back home. They commute more and more and longer distances. This affects the quality of life. It creates congestion, air pollution. It’s a continual struggle to educate people on this.”

Midwesterner county officials have similar experiences with provision of more affordable housing, “When growth starts to take away the character or integrity of a good neighborhood, residents don’t like that, and rightly so. People don’t like starter homes built in established expensive neighborhoods.” Says another, “There is a very strong bias against affordable apartments in the county . . . There is a stigma out there about it. People associate it with something that is undesirable, transient – image is a big barrier.” He adds, “People don’t realize that working families cannot afford to live here.” Comments are unrelentingly familiar: “There is some reluctance on the part of the general public. Affordable housing is perceived as low class and they are reluctant to have it built in their neighborhoods.” “We have a large market for upper-middle income families and, once those families move in, they want to shut the door behind them. They are very opposed to multi-family housing. Proposals for multi-family housing get shut down. Then, there is not enough housing for high school and college grads, so they move out. We are not creating a community.”

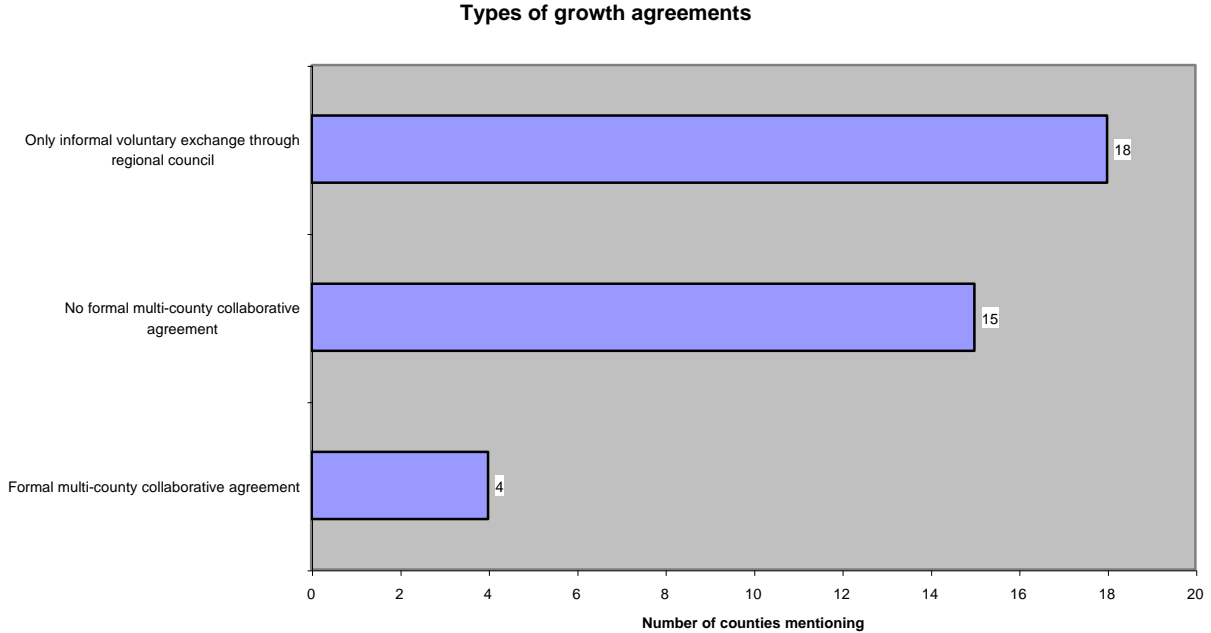
Similar echoes appear in the East. “People moved here six months ago and now they are concerned about growth. They get here and want to close the gate behind them.” “Anything with density or large scale projects are increasingly met with neighborhood opposition. We haven’t gotten to the point where opposition is winning elections, but almost. The mayor won by only three votes.”

A more moderate tone resonates in an East Coast county, “We’ve seen some of that with opposition to apartments. The popular impression is that affordable housing is connected to crime. The attitude is not a huge problem. We’ve had no proposals that were turned down.”

## **Collaborative efforts on growth and affordable housing**

An overwhelming majority of county officials did not cite the existence of collaborative agreements on growth in their region. Only 4 mention one, while 15 say they have nothing and 18 say they have only informal voluntary cooperation through their regional council.

## Most collaborative efforts



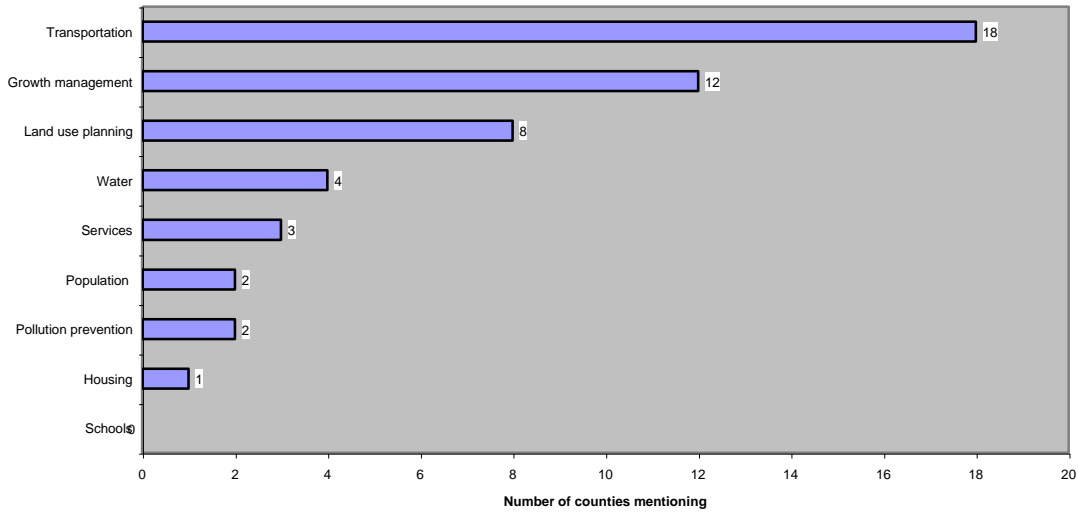
spring from cooperation along shared boundaries. One county planning director in the West explains, “It’s funny. The only real relationship with our [core city] is when development is on the edge and may impact them.” The county tries to coordinate where there is overlap to mitigate the impact of development. The official says there is not a lot of interaction, but notes, “We are leaning toward working on some IGAs with cities within our county where there is joint infrastructure.” Another Western county planning director reports similar experiences, “From a planning point of view, there’s not much of a relationship [with our core city]. We will refer land use applications if they are for an area near our common border for their review and comment.” He adds that they also have parks in the county and so they do have to cooperate with regard to those parks and they are moving more to cooperate on maintenance and other issues.” Says a Southern official, we also have a memorandum of understanding from years ago with Montgomery and others to give each jurisdiction notice when there is major land use development occurring within about 2 miles of a common jurisdictional line.

A wealthy, slow growth county in the West is working on an areawide housing authority to cover cities and counties, and their official comments, “There needs to be a summit on this.”

For another Edge County, a change in political leadership offers a chance for collaboration, according to the county manager there. “. . . we haven’t had a city mayor come outside the perimeter in a number of years. She is the first one to say we need to work together as a region. So we think we’ll see a whole new approach. County is always willing to work with them, but their issues are very different from ours.”

Most often, county staff members mention transportation when discussing informal collaboration, followed by growth management and then land use planning.

**Presence of informal collaboration on growth issues**



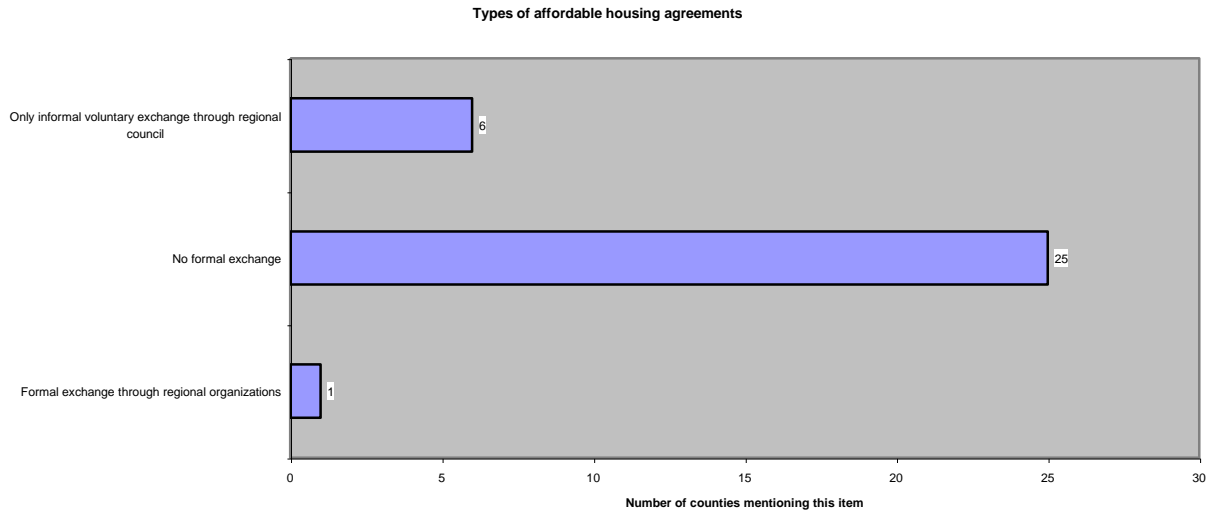
Another reports a relationship strained at most times, “But they are why we are here. We are here because city was born and the suburb followed . . . Urban schools are always in crisis, our schools are good; we are wealthy, they are not; our chairman does not have a lot in common with mayor.” The county manager continues, “[The core city] is our hometown . . . Some in the county wanted a symphony here, and our own art museums. I said that these attractions should be downtown; we should not compete. Keep them where they are now and refurbish them. They define and benefit the city. We’d have our soccer fields and malls for our long-term viability. That’s the best approach. I was born in [the core city]. We have to do this together and it raises all boats.”

Sometimes there is no cooperation when there should be, adds a Southern official. “To the West is [our neighboring] county – that is where the local major development is.” He continues, “Just across our common boundary line is a large retirement community where 200 to 250 houses a month are being built. This means 100,000 people. This impacts our county.”

If something is going on near the edge of county, they will notify other counties. For development in the outer fringe, they share information on land use matters and decisions with neighboring counties and the city. While they share information, they do not make a formal commitment or policy

Virtually no intercounty collaborative work in affordable housing was discussed by respondents. The question generally has been met with surprise that it would be asked. Twenty-five respondents say there is no such activity in their county.

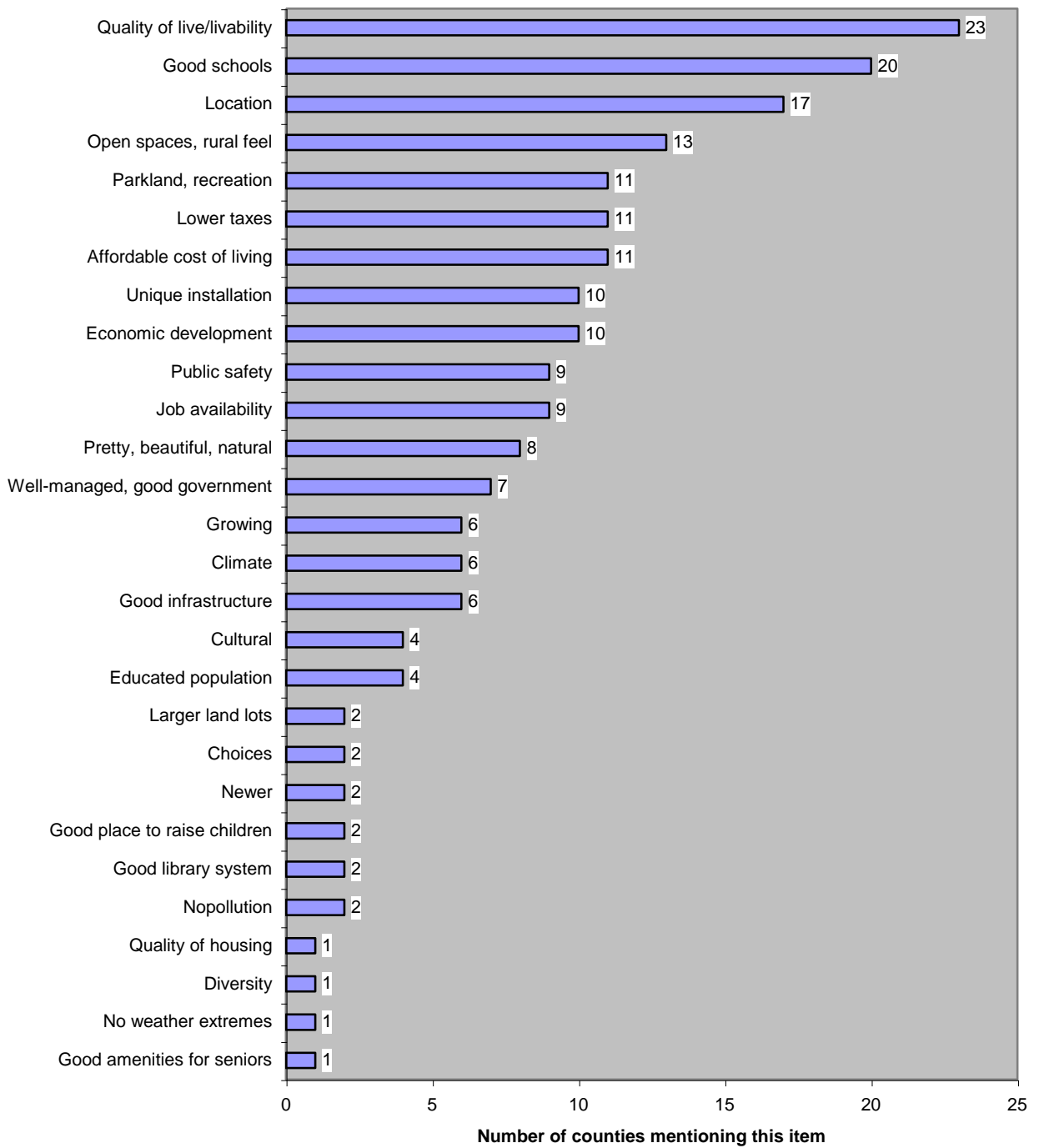




## The good life

The fast growth counties have, partly due to their wealth and partly due to their natural assets, managed to preserve enough of their attractiveness that their rapid growth continues. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62 percent) believe that the quality of life remains so strong in their counties that that remains the chief attraction, followed closely by good schools and location and open spaces/rural feel. Tied for fifth were parkland/recreation/water/lakes, lower taxes, and affordable cost of living

### Reasons for continued county growth



## **APPENDIX**

### **Cases in comprehensive urban policy management**

These are examples of a few Edge Counties that manage better than their peer counties the demands for green space, affordable housing, employment, schools, and transportation and other infrastructure. The key is their ability to influence all aspects of development impacted by growth. These successful counties manage this through comprehensive planning, municipal-style authority, regulatory ordinances, extensive work with local governments and communities, and/or core principles accepted by all jurisdictions in the county. This type of management allows planners and political leaders to take ameliorative and integrated policy steps based upon the pre-established core principles. It enables them through coordinated planning and policy-making to prevent many growth problems or mitigate their impacts.

#### **County A**

Like many Edge Counties, this Southern county has a high demand for residential development. In order to ensure that a request for development doesn't overburden existing facilities, the county requires development to go through adequate facilities testing (AFT). All residential development (and also commercial and industrial) goes through this AFT test. This insures that residential development does not outpace public infrastructure - roads, schools, water, or sewer capacity. One APF applies to schools and places limitations upon development when capacity is reached; another applies to roads. In order to have development, the county requires improvements in infrastructure, regulated through the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. The county counterbalances growth with county executive initiatives for the preservation of agriculture and open space, and functional plans for greenway protections, and bike and pedestrian paths. A general development plan provides guidelines for growth, housing, and transportation.

#### **County B**

A county in the Far West that saw tremendous growth in the late-1960s passed Guidelines for Orderly Development and established Sphere of Influence Boundaries. These policies require approval for expansion of utility districts and infrastructure. The policies place major restraints on large-scale development and create self-contained cities that are growing outward. All smaller community plans within the county are covered by this county general plan. Levels of service designations have been developed, and are applied to parts of the county transportation infrastructure. Those that cannot absorb more growth, for example, get the designation of level of service F, which means no more subdivisions can be approved in that area. Almost every city in the county has some kind of growth management plan, reducing land consumption acreage.

#### **County C**

A rapidly-growing Midwest county illustrates an integrated policy approach to growth management. County policies are set to equally keep new growth affordable and non-sprawling, while continuing to keep the older parts of the county in good repair and attractive. There is

active balancing of new growth with maintenance of existing development. Half the county land has been incorporated, and the county has contained 97 percent of the population in the incorporated territory. The county policy requires new growth to pay for itself, but admits such a policy has to be planned very carefully. It requires a delicate commercial and residential mix. The county is considering an excise tax upon unincorporated territory as a means to make it no cheaper to build further out and to encourage in-fill development. The comprehensive plan update will reinforce this. The county's integrated development approach benefits from the county's authority to run utilities and services for the entire county and all cities. The county is examining its sewer development policy to make it more consistent with its policies towards new growth and existing development. The county has developed a set of integrated policies

## County D

Counties have to take a different approach where states give the municipalities most of the control, an approach using public education, technical assistance, and persuasion. An Eastern county has been experiencing rapid growth, adding 8000-9000 housing units a year, all during the last decade, and also 8-10 million square feet of commercial and office construction a year. The service array of the county is unusual. All roads are state or municipal owned, though about a hundred bridges are county-owned. The county runs the courts and prisons, but has no water treatment or sewage treatment responsibilities. In 1996 the county comprehensive plan was tied in with boroughs and townships plans. The county provides technical assistance to 73 municipalities to see that their individual plans are consistent with the county comprehensive plan. Before a municipality makes a decision on their comprehensive plan or zoning, they must send it to the county. The county does a consistency review – a critique and audit of the local plan – and it has 30 days to respond. The county gets 50-60 of these a month. If a municipality has a land use plan, it supercedes the county's plan. The county is advisory only. The county has a further hurdle in its ability to communicate with local elected officials, because they are part time. Because the cooperation is voluntary, the county staff works extensively out in the communities. The county budget for local planning assistance to local governments is more than that of the state's budget for local planning assistance to local governments. As regards the plan, there are 300-350 elected officials making decisions.

## Edge County Survey Findings

### Finding #1

Edge County officials mention five county needs - green space, affordable housing, transportation and other physical infrastructure, employment, and schools – that are most impacted by rapid growth. They say the consequences of growth on these needs are largely predictable, but the rapidity of growth overwhelms their capacity to respond simultaneously on so many fronts.

A Western county official comments about his county, "The growth was predictable – the housing is cheaper than in the city."

A Midwest county executive explains, "We don't have many potholes, but we sure do have a

lot of orange [road construction] barrels.”

## Finding #2

Only a few Edge Counties have a person, place, and plan that has them start the day by thinking about how they balance these five needs and also knowing they have the resources to do so.

From a Midwest county executive: “We are a rapidly growing county. . . . People are moving here for our quality of life, and, when they move to the urban fringe area, they want the same level of services that everyone else has. This gets rather expensive. So, how do you pay for that? Adopt a policy that says new growth has to pay for itself, but that [policy] has to be planned very carefully. They will say they do not want that tax burden. We must have appropriate kinds of mixed development – commercial and residential, and in balance – the supports that are needed in building community.” The county has developed a set of integrated policies.

A Far West official reports similar circumstances, “The 1994 county general plan dictates everything – we must have the infrastructure in place, and growth must pay for itself.” All smaller community plans within the county are covered by this county general plan.

## Finding #3

Factors that prevent a county from gaining equilibrium among the five needs vary from county to county.

- Counties may not have responsibility for all of the five functions; other governments wield the control.
- State tax policies may prevent counties from having an impact upon some of these five functions, may permit long stretches of continuous urbanization within and between counties, and may raise too few funds to address current and future needs.
- States do not supply appropriate planning toolboxes to counties.
- States may not have growth management acts or incentives for balancing the five functions.
- States draft general policies that meet the needs of their average counties; and unusual counties (such as Edge Counties) learn that these general state policies do not address their needs.
- Many counties lack a comprehensive plan, person, or agency that authoritatively focuses on balancing the five needs.
- Some counties don’t have land use authority.
- States may not have fair housing laws.
- Local and state tax caps restrict revenue generation.
- Overextension of resources for transportation infrastructure provision reduces ability to meet other four needs.

“We went from seven percent of commuting out-of-county to 27 percent out-of-county now after 15 years,” a county official observes. The only transportation money comes from the state gas tax that has not been increased in 12 years, is not indexed for inflation, and only pays for

maintenance. The result is that no road building has been done.

A leader from an East Coast county talked of how the state's tax policy is the biggest hindrance to affordable housing, observing that, "Communities just don't want affordable housing because of the impact from the tax rate. We have been fighting this for a long time. We went all the way to the State Supreme court, and the Court ruled against the state."

In the Midwest, a county official relates that, "The biggest perpetrator is state policy on tax laws. All cities are competing for dollars, and housing becomes a burden. It is a net loss. Commercial is a net plus."

An official in the South reports, "There was a statewide growth management task force a few years ago. It just disappeared. . . .I think the state could do a whole lot more. There are no incentives to do regional stuff."

A Western county mentions their immediate problem of wildfire and drought. The problem for the county is that it doesn't provide water and sewer. These are provided by special districts. "The schools are challenged and still are, but we don't run the school district, either."

An official explains, "There is a problem that is more magnified in [our state] than in other states. The state, in having to deal with all local governments, they are forced to create a policy that hits at the middle. Our county's needs are not being met by 'the general.'"

A county in the East has no control over the roads. "All our roads are state or municipalities. There are a 100 bridges that are our responsibility."

A Southern county official cites as a significant advantage for them that they are "one of two counties in the state to control our own road system."

In a Western county, "The one hindrance [for outside the urban growth boundary is that] a lot of the land [that is over 35 acres in size] is being subdivided into smaller parcels and we can't do a thing about it because under state law these large holdings are exempt from subdivision law. This development style degrades the air quality, impacts schools, roadways. They don't pay for their own services; the county only gets to review building permits, but has no authority."

## Finding #4

As Edge Counties play catch up with one of the five needs, other needs can escalate in the interim. This domino effect is common.

One deputy county manager comments, "In the 1970s, we didn't keep up with our needs. Now we have to meet the challenges for today while catching up." He says it will take 8 to 10 years of school construction before every student seat will be in a permanent school; it will take building a fire station every other year for the next thirty years to achieve adequate public safety. There are serious parkland needs.

A West Coast county reports that transportation failings hindered economic development. “Disjointed transportation resulted in the county not experiencing the late 1990s employment surge that other parts of the region experienced.”

In the West, one county reports, “Our educational system needs attention and upgrading. The system is overwhelmed by growth. We need double and triple size the capacity. Student population quadrupled in the last five years.” They said they don’t know how to deal with it, that there is no administration and no tools. “When a school has quadrupled in size in five years and you have classrooms in mobile trailers, there is no time for the administration or tools to develop that could handle the requirements of the urban-sized school.”

In the Midwest, a planner explains, “We are a county through which others travel. . . . Beyond us are what we call the collar counties. . . .There are no jobs in these counties. . . .We are providing the infrastructure for them to get to the jobs without getting their tax dollars. . . .We will not see new state and federal highways. As traffic becomes more congested on them, we see it shifting over and backing up onto our county highway system. It is having a domino effect. County roads had an intended capacity that we are reaching sooner than expected.”

From the Rocky Mountain region, an official suggests, “For the most part, citizens oppose some things we actually want to promote as far as commercial and for tax base. They get upset with county for not putting in a bunch of roads to deal with growth. County just does not have enough resources to support infrastructure.”

A different official from that region says, “The commissioners kind of resent another body [the state] telling them what to do. But they understand that county doesn’t have the resources to continue to allow sprawl the way it has been in the last twenty years.”

“For the most part, citizens oppose some things we actually want to promote as far as commercial and for tax base. They get upset with county for not putting in a bunch of roads to deal with growth. County just does not have enough resources to support infrastructure.”

A Midwest official repeats a familiar comment, “Some of the biggest challenges have to do with financing the infrastructure that goes along with growth.”

A Western planner explains, “[Business’] concern is the ability to retain employees and have affordable housing in the area. Most of the housing in the SE corridor is not that affordable—school teachers, clerical, administrative, etc, have a difficult time finding affordable housing. The county also has an airport, so you can’t mix housing with the airport. It’s difficult to find a location for affordable housing.”

Another reports, “This means the other individuals [of more moderate means] have to live outside of [the city] and drive 30, 40, 50 miles to work and then back home. They commute more and more and longer distances. This affects the quality of life. It creates congestion, air pollution. It’s a continual struggle to educate people on this.”

A planning director in the East says, “In this county, with the wealth, it puts a lot of pressure on

the other end of the scale. On my staff, I have planners that live in a neighboring county, an hour away. We're pushing these people away."

A very suburban county in the South notes, "As we grow in affluence, entry level salaried teachers and police officers have trouble with housing availability."

"[Affordable housing issues] represent problems for employment," reports an employee in a Midwest county. "People who work here cannot afford the housing. This includes essential workers – police, fire, teachers. Also elderly people can't pay property taxes or maintain their homes – they have to move out of the county."

Similarly, "If you are a regular person, but you cannot afford a down payment, then you have two choices. Don't move here. Or you can move into a small city in a fringe or rural area, but it will be farther away, and services are a little more removed, and the benefits of the large metropolitan area are not going to be so accessible."

## Finding #5

Endogenous factors assist Edge County efforts to achieve a balance between green space, housing, transportation, other physical infrastructure, employment, and schools. These include:

- the ratio of incorporated to unincorporated land – just 20 percent of the population of some counties lived within cities in incorporated territory; in others, it was 100 percent because the entire county was incorporated; and in others, while half the county land was incorporated, 97 percent of the population resided there
- their unique county characteristics such as endangered species' stream setbacks that consume much developable land, a two-mile wide isthmus through which all cross-county transportation has to pass, or geologic glacial activity creating significant unique habitats.

One official explains, "We also have regional considerations that impact housing affordability because we have an endangered species listing in the coho salmon – the only listing in a metropolitan area. It has caused some impact in land availability. It requires setbacks from salmon bearing streams. This has had a significant impact as well on agricultural land. It doesn't take a degree in economics to realize that if there is less land, then the cost will go up."

Another notes, "Our county is fairly small . . . and very narrow . . . two miles at its narrowest." This "unusual geography" will require that they put more effort to transit such as light rail, commuter rail, or express bus.

## Finding #6

Edge County officials mention three problems significantly more frequently than others: transportation provision, provision of other infrastructure, and sprawl.

## Finding #7

Not all Edge Counties are having the problems typically associated with growth.



In the West, an official says, “Presently, growth pressures are not pre-eminent.”

A Southern county official says, “We’re probably overloaded with starter homes versus upper end.”

“People may not want growth. But they need to do the math. The math is that new growth is needed for revenues. The public perception is beginning to catch up—we need growth for the economy.”

“There’s not a lot a lot of anti-growth attitude,” a Western official explains. “Here growth is welcome. Managing and directing it are the challenges. It must be managed and directed in the right ways.”

## Finding #8

Current planning tools to balance rapid growth and an Edge County’s green space, housing, transportation, other physical infrastructure, employment, and schools are not uniformly available to many counties.

Two respondents from different counties in a Southern state provide parallel comments. “Our tool box isn’t as full as it could be.”

A Western county official observes, “We have no unified planning requirements, no requirement that links service provisions with growth concurrency. Schools are separate from local government so growth has had a big impact on schools because there is no way to legally connect them. We tried to do impact fees for schools and lost at the Supreme Court.”

## Finding #9

Most Edge Counties utilize a potpourri of planning tools to counter the effects of rapid growth upon their counties. These include:

- general comprehensive or land use plans
- specialized plans
- growth boundaries or urban service demarcations
- sales taxes for open space purchases
- zoning and subdivision regulations

and less frequently-mentioned:

- benchmarking, intergovernmental agreements with the municipalities in the county
- recordation tax for purchase of farmland development rights and for school construction
- memorandums of understanding
- bond referendum to acquire green space
- regional improvement districts
- state growth management acts

- requirement that new growth pay for itself

“Spending on transportation has been level for 20 years,” says one local official. Confronting the transportation crisis, the state legislature passed two transportation bills – one significantly raised the gas tax specifically to build highways; another enabled the creation of a Regional Transportation Improvement District. The counties that are parties to the transportation district have not collectively reached agreement to initiate it. Discussions center on how to equitably apportion regional money, given that spending may need to be directed more heavily into one county’s road projects.

Others mention, “We are seeing state government getting more involved in matters that are supposed to be the prerogative of local government – land use decisions. For example, the mobile home industry has been successful in getting [our state] to pass legislation to dictate how local governments have to accommodate mobile home units. The homebuilders association is getting the state to require cluster provisions in zoning ordinances. . . .The state is micromanaging.”

“If something is going on near the edge of county, we will notify other counties. For development in the outer fringe, we share information on land use matters and decisions with neighboring counties and the city,” an official in the South reports.

In the West, a state with a growth management act requires localities to have an economic policy and affordable housing policy in place, “The law is on the county side.”

## Finding #10

In a quarter of the counties contacted, citizen activism does not influence county efforts on growth management, and, in about two-fifths of the counties, citizen involvement works to encourage a slow or no-growth county policy.

“There is not a political consensus to use some of the tools for smart growth . . . This is a polarized issue among those who are vocal on both sides.” He suggests that the county needs to end somewhere in the middle. Property rights are a fundamental quality of life. That clashes with those who are opposed to growth.”

In the West, a county official mentions that, during its “growth moment,” the county was the “poster child statewide for acrimony,” adding it was a contest of “the developers versus the greenies.”

Responsibility for the environment may mean overseeing the private sector’s developments. One county official told of fielding an angry complaint about a new cell tower in a neighborhood known for verdant landscapes. “The caller is complaining and yells, ‘I can see it from my back porch!’ I think of where she might be standing, so I ask where she is calling from. She was calling from a cell phone.”

## Finding #11

Local officials' suggestions on their state's role and impact at the local level focus upon five themes: the lack of policies, unsuitable policies, the fiscal impact of policies, beneficial policies, and authority bestowed to counties.

Typical of such comments that the state does not permit counties to have much impact upon growth is one from a Southern location, "We have a very traditional – read conservative – General Assembly when it comes to zoning and land use. Dillon's Rule, that the county can only exercise authority specifically delegated to them by the state, is in effect." The official explains that this means the tools they have available are limited to what is available through the state code. He continues, "We don't have a whole lot of opportunities, options, or authority that are available to other local governments in other parts of the country."

Out West, one official says, "There is a serious lack of state policy relating to land use issues and growth. . . We are supposed to be required by state every five years to update the housing element of our general plan. The state hasn't required it recently, but we are now working on the '92 plan update."

Similarly from the South, "I'd almost count the state as irrelevant, maybe even more of a hindrance. I'm only sort of kidding."

In the East, a county leader says, "The state does help. It helps everywhere from individual residents and also as a supportive agency to help educate county council members on the need to update regulations. . . We are lucky to be in a state that is on the forefront in [smart growth]."

In the Midwest, "State policies support what [our county] is already doing—so it is a help. From a state perspective, the legislature has not been supportive of transportation issues."

## Finding #12

There is no consensus on ways to provide affordable housing. The few Edge Counties that have had some success have had multiple partners for projects – private developers, nonprofits and governmental funding sources – plus a process that sits "on standby," so that, if land and funding appear, the county can go immediately to its partners and grab the opportunity.

According to one Midwestern official, "There are certain parts of the county where nonprofits have come in, assembled resources from a whole bunch of different places, and that's what needs to be looked at."

A New England community has instituted a "region wide housing task force that is trying to get banking, local land use planning officials, and others to get a better understanding of what the present policies create and to overcome disincentives."

A Western county works for incentives, "The problem here is a lack of developers building

those type of units. There is less profit involved in these homes. If there weren't such a market for more expensive homes they might build more affordable ones, but the profit is just too high on expensive homes for them to want to build cheaper homes. . . . We are looking at these options [incentives] as we update the housing element of our general plan. . . .If the county can provide all of the above [incentives], hopefully there will be enough incentive for developers to provide it. . . . Also we currently have a contract with an affordable housing developer, so, if there is land, we can immediately go to this group – otherwise it would be a long bid process.”

The county chair of a Southern county mentions they have collaborative agreements with their nonprofits, “You can justify using nonprofits if they accomplish or address issues that the community should be addressing.”

One policy maker notes, “In the last month or so, we have connected our private housing industry and the economic development department.”

### Finding #13

County officials have many ideas about what they do use or would like to use to provide more affordable housing for the working poor, including:

- state and county housing trust funds
- county housing authorities with community development powers
- affordable housing elements within comprehensive plans
- housing consortiums that exist to create partnerships and remove disincentives
- density bonuses though some reasoned that if they strain the infrastructure beyond the capacity set for that neighborhood, then overall the county has not gained
- state fair housing laws that provide incentives for inclusion of low income housing in market rate developments
- fee waiver programs
- county excise taxes
- expedited processing
- ordinances to prohibit construction of single family homes on land designated for multi-family use
- mixed-use ordinances
- state bonds for housing

From the Northwest, another said, “Primarily we have looked at tax credits and we find that a number of developers need help navigating the complexity of receiving them. They are used, but we have to put a lot of time and effort into helping developers navigate the bureaucracy.”

A Midwest county executive reports, “If the county had better mass transportation system, we could have corridors of development identified for bus routes where these homes should be built. That then makes building affordable housing more of a market decision to the developers, which is what they operate on.”

A county executive in the South explains, “We have a mixed-use ordinance under review by a

stakeholders group. We presently cannot let residential units go above a commercial development. . . . How do we provide housing that is affordable? We don't have an answer yet. We're looking for one. . . . We deal with this now for developers by breaking up the development site into smaller parcel lots of different zoning codes."

In the East, one official supported state laws, commenting, "The state has a Fair Housing Act. Municipalities are supposed to provide for low and moderate housing. Laws allow a developer to build to higher densities in exchange for 1 in 5 units of low and moderate housing."

And in the South, there was this insight, "Developers have proposed infill projects in municipalities – this is one way to handle sprawl. There is extreme opposition. . . . As soon as infill hits the table, people go berserk."

Says a Midwest planner, "We have had a zoning density for planned development since 2000, but we haven't had anyone use it yet."

In the Far West region, one leader says, "There is some opposition from people who don't want higher density. But the growth management act requires higher density —smaller lots and encouraging condos. The law is on the county side."

.Another East Coast county staffer says, "[Our state] zones for land use, not for people, not for income. The only thing the community can control is density. In prosperous communities, developers want to build for the upscale market if the density is higher, not for the lower end, such as building luxury condos. These [density] policies have backfired. It is possible to build for the lower end. I am not sure what it would take – probably some money. I would like to know."

Also from the Far West, "The reason land use patterns look like they do is because the housing situation is aggravated by taxes. When we build big box retail, it drives mid- and lower-housing out of the county. We grapple with this within our regional government, because cities are not interested in making equality happen. We are trying for a per capita based distribution [of taxes] rather than a point of sale which is inequitable. . . . We have fiscalization of land use. There's no market incentive. We cannot control the land."

"The big gorilla here," says an official, "is that the sole source of funding for schools is the local property tax. There is no sales tax or state income tax. There is no incentive for apartments because they will be a breeding ground for children and need for more services. This will be an incredible new expense . . . Unless they find a new solution to education funding, we will continue to have a natural disincentive to provide affordable housing."

"The state isn't beating down my door asking for affordable housing."

There's a similar assessment of a Southern state, "The state has not played a very big role in the housing affordability picture. They had to pass the authorizing legislation to establish the housing authorities, but that's it."

A Midwest official has similar words, “The state encourages towns not to use zoning in an exclusionary way and that should be a goal. But these are just words. It doesn’t really help or hurt. It just doesn’t do much at all.”

## Finding #14

A third of the counties report that community opposition to efforts to meet housing affordability needs impacts those efforts, but a fourth say the opposite – that there is opposition, but it does not affect the outcome. Another third report community support for affordable housing in their county.

According to one Western official, ““The community can certainly slow things down – we have had legal challenges on the last two projects – we were sued. It makes it undesirable for builders to become involved in such projects. . . . We do have situations where opposition has stalled or significantly changed projects.”

Again from the West, “Community opposition to affordable housing always has a negative impact. Even if a community has the political power to get these things in, it’s never to the extent that they had hoped for. It gets whittled down.”

A more moderate tone resonates in an East Coast county, “We’ve seen some of that with opposition to apartments. The popular impression is that affordable housing is connected to crime. The attitude is not a huge problem. We’ve had no proposals that were turned down.”

## Finding #15

Many staff members, and their communities, translate public intervention in the housing market as meaning assistance for the very poor. This translation occurs despite interview questions carefully worded to apply to low or moderate wage working families.

“There is a very strong bias against affordable apartments in the county . . . There is a stigma out there about it. People associate it with something that is undesirable, transient – image is a big barrier.”

In the West, a county staffer explains, “It is a mixed bag, depending on where you are. Those in the rural areas with lesser incomes want affordability. . . .Higher income areas don’t want ‘those people’ around them. There is some sensitivity to the way a project is laid out — can it provide for a range of income levels?”

Another Western staff member says, “There are concerns or biases for the rental housing market. When marketed to somewhat higher income, it’s a problem still, as almost a threat to a rural way of life. . .creeping urbanism.”

## Finding #16

Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe that the quality of life remains so strong in their counties that, despite the growth rate, quality of life remains the chief attraction, followed closely by good schools, location, and open spaces/rural feel.

“It’s a good place to raise kids,” says a Western official.

A Southern county executive says, “We have an expanding employment base. There are jobs for folks.”

In the Midwest, a planner explains, “There is the perception that tax rates are lower. We have more affordable housing. We’re part of the metro region, but we have a ‘rural flavor’.”

## Finding #17

Part of the variability in Edge Counties derives from the broad definition of Edge Counties.

“Look at the numbers. In [this] area, we are the smallest county. In terms of population growth, this means our percentage change can more readily spike. [Two neighboring counties] have much bigger population growth, but they are large, so their percentage change is on a lesser scale.”