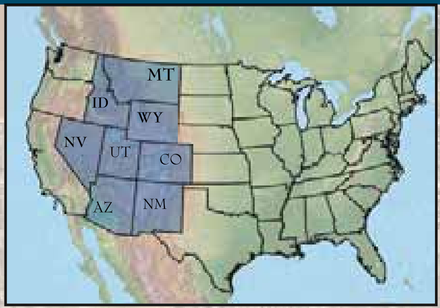
The Growing Rockies:

New People, New Communities, New Urbanism

By Julianne Kellogg and Chris Jackson



The eight-state Rocky Mountain West is a region in transition. Rapid population growth, perhaps above all else, fuels change in the Rockies. The steady influx of people from all over the country, as well as foreign-born residents, contributes to the strength of the economy and social fabric of the Rockies Region. However, these new residents also increase pressure on the Rockies' infrastructure and natural amenities. Included in the changes sparked by the current population explosion are major modifications to the size and character of our metropolitan centers.

In 2005 the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project presented an analysis of urban sprawl in the eight-state Rocky Mountain West. Large and small metropolitan statistical areas were graded on a sprawl index that measured housing unit density.[1] The analysis spurred discussion on the effects of sprawl in the Rockies' metropolitan centers. A survey of recent articles on Headwaters News and NewWest.net show that the debate is still active.[2]

This year, the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project returns to the theme of urban growth patterns in the Rockies. The goal of this piece, as with the 2005 article, is not to resolve the debate between planned and unplanned growth; rather, we aim to elevate the level of dialog by looking at growth patterns rather than sprawl. In this section of the *State of the Rockies Report Card*, we provide detailed statistics on population growth and demographics and expand on the "urban dynamic" debate by taking a closer look at three development trends emerging in the Rockies: smart growth and "new urbanism," retirement communities, and gated communities.

Although only one of these development schemes—new urbanism—is a direct response to sprawl, all three types involve themes

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familiar to State of the Rockies readers and citizens of the Rockies: land use patterns, equity, the regional economy, and the environment. Regardless of whether you have weighed in on the debate between sprawl and planned development, the following statistics and case studies provide a more detailed portrait of growth in the Rockies.

National, Regional, and Municipal Growth

The population of the United States officially hit 300 million on October 17, 2006, just 39 years after reaching 200 million.[3] Between 2000 and 2005, the U.S. population grew 2 percent.[4] Most of this growth occurred in the nation's major cities; 79 percent of the population resides in urban areas, up from 64.3 percent in 1950 and 39.8 percent in 1900.[5] The Rockies Region shows similar growth trends to the United States as a whole, but at a greater magnitude. From 2000 to 2005, the Rockies grew 9%–4.5 times the national rate.[6] Figure 1 shows the region's population growth by state since 1900. Contrary to the perception that it is mostly rural, the population of the Rockies is actually more urbanized than the U.S. as a whole. In 2000, 83 percent of Rockies residents lived in an urban area, up from 55 percent in 1950 and 32 percent in 1900.[7]

A closer look at metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the Rockies yields similarly eye-opening growth trends. Figure 2 shows the Rocky Mountain region's MSAs and their county components. Figures 3 and 4 show 2006 population estimates and 2011 growth projections for Rockies MSA's and counties. Compared to urban growth nationwide, Western cities are booming.

While Western cities are clearly growing, the reasons for this growth are not as well understood. A Brookings Institution study published in May 2001 examined urban growth throughout the 1990s and extrapolated the common characteristics of the nation's fast-growing cities.[8] It is difficult to determine causality with some of the following indicators of metropolitan growth. That is, do cities attract new residents because they have a higher mean family income, or do some cities have a higher mean family income because they are growing? Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that these are characteristics that fast growing cities have in common, but they are not necessarily the reason for their growth.

Figure 1
Rockies Population by State 1900-2005
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

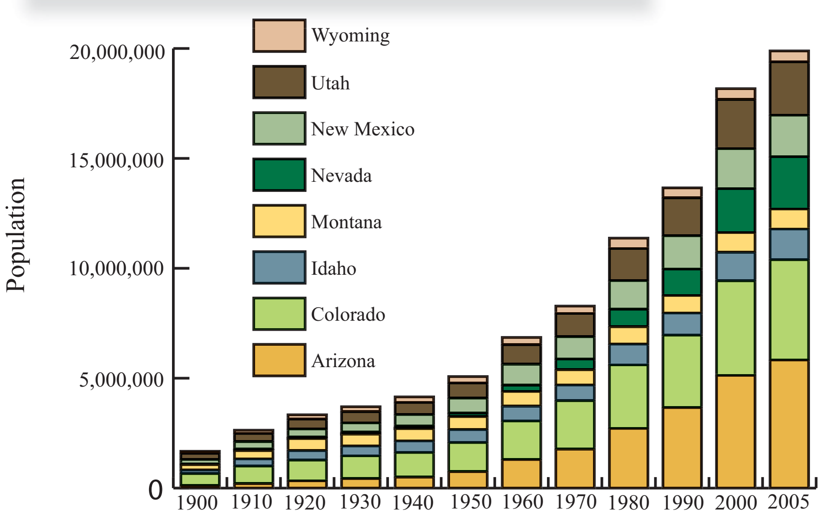
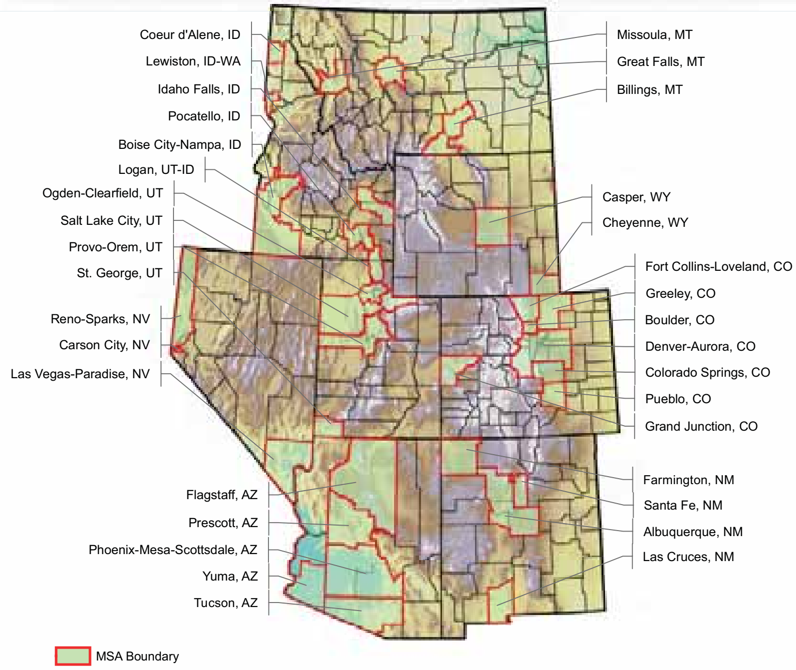


Figure 2
Rockies Metropolitan Statistical Areas and their County Components
Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Nonetheless, these traits are a valuable means of exploring where future Rockies growth may occur. The Brookings study lists the following metropolitan growth indicators:

-Western location: cities in the West (including the west coast) grew 19.5% from 1990 to 2000, considerably higher than the 8.7% median growth rate for cities nationwide.
-High rate of human capital: Human capital is typically measured by educational attainment rates. Cities with high rates of educational attainment grew faster than those with low rates.
-Median income: Income is another measure of human capital. The Brookings study found that cities with median household income greater than $30,000 grew by 18.9%, while cities with median household income less than $20,000 grew only 0.3%
-Service Industry: Cities with high levels of employment in services, wholesale and retail trade, or finance, insurance, and real estate grew, while cities that relied on manufacturing shrank.
-Car-centric: Cities where 65% or more of the population commuted alone to work grew by over 12%, while cities with fewer commuters grew less than 2%. This trend may reflect the age of a city rather than the effect of mass transit. Cities with an older building stock tend to decline, and older cities tend to have more mass transit options and fewer commuters.
-High immigrant population: Cities with larger foreign-born populations grew the fastest from 1990–2000.

City rating guides may also provide insight as to why some cities are attractive. The Places Rated Almanac and Cities Ranked & Rated guides judge metropolitan areas based on numerous criteria including cost of living, economy and jobs,

Facing page photo: Salt Lake City

Figure 3
2006 Population Estimates of Rockies Counties
Source: Geolytics, 2006 Estimates and 2011 Projections Professional

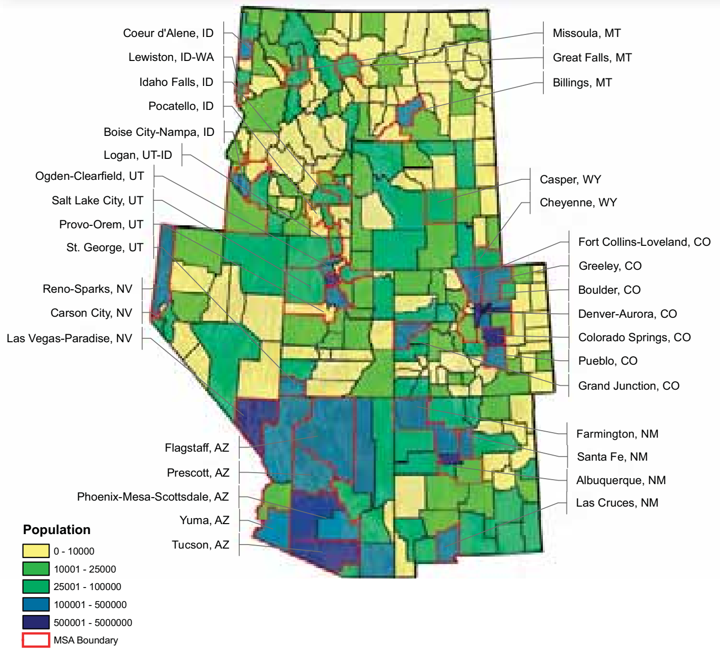
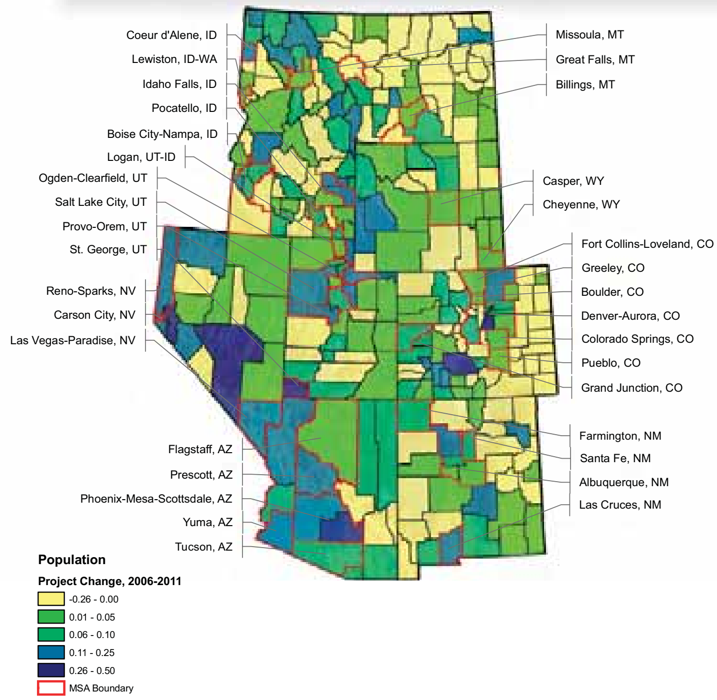


Figure 4
2011 Population Projected Percent Change for Rockies Counties
Source: Geolytics, 2006 Estimates and 2011 Projections Professional

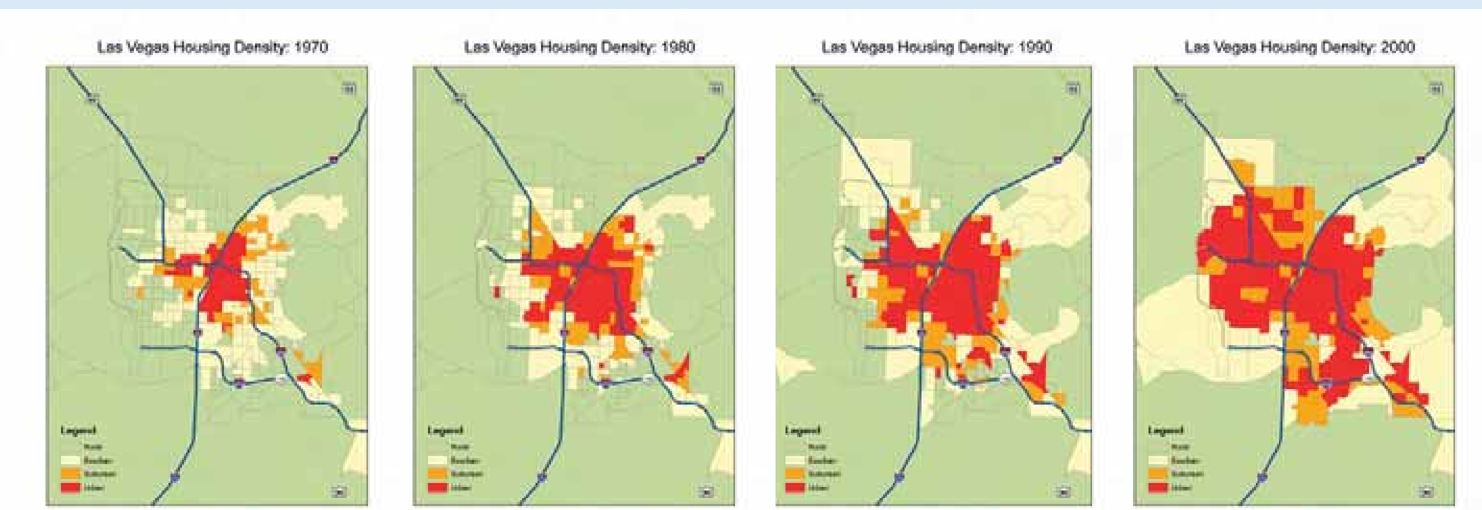


climate, education, health and healthcare, crime, transportation, leisure, arts and culture, quality of life, crime, and recreation. Western MSAs appear sporadically in the guides' top 30 lists, but the only categories where Western cities consistently earn high ranks are for economy and projected job growth. The Places Rated Almanac places Phoenix–Mesa and Las Vegas first and second, and Salt Lake City–Ogden, Denver, Tucson, and Boise within the top 30.[9] In Cities Ranked and Rated eight Western MSAs rank in the top 30 cities for high household income growth and nine Western MSAs are in the top 30 for projected job growth.[10]

Growth in the actual building stock of Western cities is perhaps even more pertinent to this discussion than population growth. A 2004 Brookings Institution report examined the likely increase in demand for residential units that will result from projected population growth to 2030.[11] Their results show major changes in store for the Rockies. Of the top ten states where residential construction is projected to grow the most, six are in the Rockies, with Nevada, Arizona, and Utah ranking first, second, and third, respectively (Table 1). On the city level, three MSAs in the Rockies are on the top ten list: Las Vegas (ranked #1), Phoenix (ranked #3), and Salt Lake City (ranked #8)(Table 2).[12]

These statistics demonstrate that metropolitan growth is on the way, but what form will this growth take? The following sections take a closer look at three possibilities: new urbanism projects, retirement communities, and gated communities.

The Growing Rockies: Las Vegas



The Growing Rockies: Phoenix

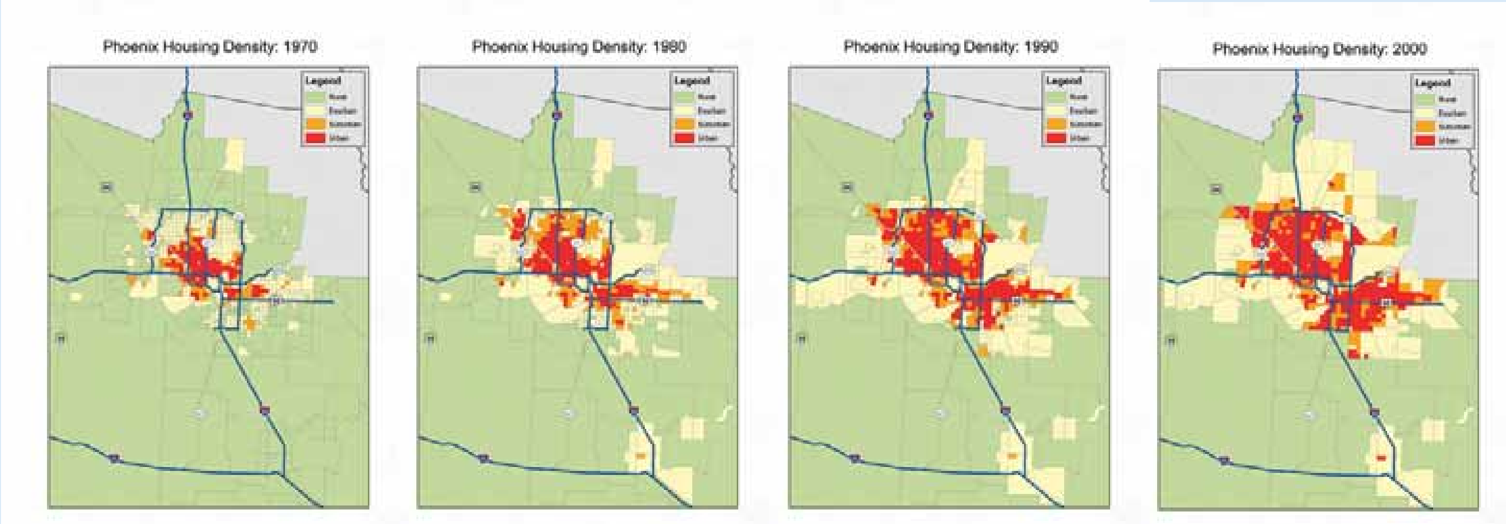


Table 1
Predicted Growth in Residential Housing Units in Rockies' States
Source: Arthur C. Nelson, "Toward a New Metropolis", 2004

State	National Rank	Rockies Rank	Percent New Housing Units, 2030
Nevada	1	1	57.9%
Arizona	2	2	54.0%
Utah	3	3	53.0%
Idaho	5	4	47.7%
Colorado	6	5	47.4%
New Mexico	8	6	45.5%
Montana	20	7	40.4%
Wyoming	34	8	34.4%

Table 2
Predicted Growth in Residential Housing Units Among Selected Rockies' MSAs
Source: Arthur C. Nelson, "Toward a New Metropolis", 2004

MSA	National Ranks	Rockies Rank	Percent New Housing Units, 2030
Las Vegas	1	1	60.3%
Phoenix	3	2	55.3%
Salt Lake City	8	3	50.5%
Tucson	12	4	49.0%
Denver	17	5	46.6%

Smart Growth and New Urbanism

To those that abhor urban sprawl, the alternative lies in "smart growth." Smart growth refers to municipal policies that promote "livability" or "place making." Specifically, it is meant to encourage walkability, compact design, mixed land use, and environmental stewardship. Frequently cited examples of smart growth polices are financing high-density development, rewriting zoning laws to allow for high density, and creating urban planning committees.[13]

The design movement of new urbanism embodies smart growth policies. Where smart growth describes the policy tools, new urbanism describes the architectural design tools that promote livability. There are several different design styles that embody smart growth ideals, such as nontraditional design and transit-oriented development, and although these terms are not completely interchangeable, for the sake of consistency and clarity we will use the term new urbanism to encompass all of them.

New urbanism was set in motion by architects Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Peter Calthorpe. By focusing on strengthening the sense of "community" within neighborhoods, new urbanism provides an alternative to the generic and redundant nature of traditional American suburbs with their cookie-cutter housing developments, malls, and office parks. A development following new urbanism principles promotes face-to-face interaction among a diverse set of neighbors by reducing exclusionary practices and private space and maximizing public space and facilities. The effort that goes into "place making" separates new urbanism from traditional-style real estate development. New urbanism is labeled a neotraditional design movement in that it seeks to create an atmosphere of cities before the automobile explosion in the 1940s. It reflects a desire to return to a time when towns had unique character that contributed to their social vibrancy and increased quality of life.

The Congress for the New Urbanism is an organization comprised of architects, city governments, environmentalists, businesses, transit agencies, and other citizens that subscribe to the tenants of the new urbanist design movement. The first two paragraphs of their "Charter for the New Urbanism" describe the general thrust of their motivation:

Community Profile: Stapleton, CO

The Stapleton redevelopment, located on the old site of the Stapleton International Airport in Denver, is the nation's largest urban infill project.[1] The project has garnered national and international attention as a large-scale new urbanism project that could "change the pattern of sprawl that has scarred so many of the nation's cities."[2]

The Plan

In 1995, Stapleton International Airport closed and the Stapleton Development Foundation produced the development plan for the Stapleton infill. The development plan, call the "Green Book," outlines the guiding principles of the project. These principles coincide with the "Charter of the New Urbanism," a document produced by the Congress for the New Urbanism and meant to lay down the fundamental ideals of the new urbanism movement. Specifically, both the Charter for the New Urbanism and Stapleton's Green Book focus on cultural and economic diversity, walkability and mass-transit, and environmental stewardship. For example, the Green Book dictates that 20 percent of the rental units and 10 percent of the for-sale units must be classified as affordable housing to encourage diversity. Individual neighborhoods within the Stapleton redevelopment are to be built around schools and multi-use community facilities that act as the hub of the neighborhood. In addition to the environmental benefits of promoting walkability, the plan calls for an energy and water conscious infrastructure. Stapleton also boasts more than 1,100 acres of parks, trails, and open space, increasing the total amount of open space in the Denver area by 25 percent.[3]

Implementation

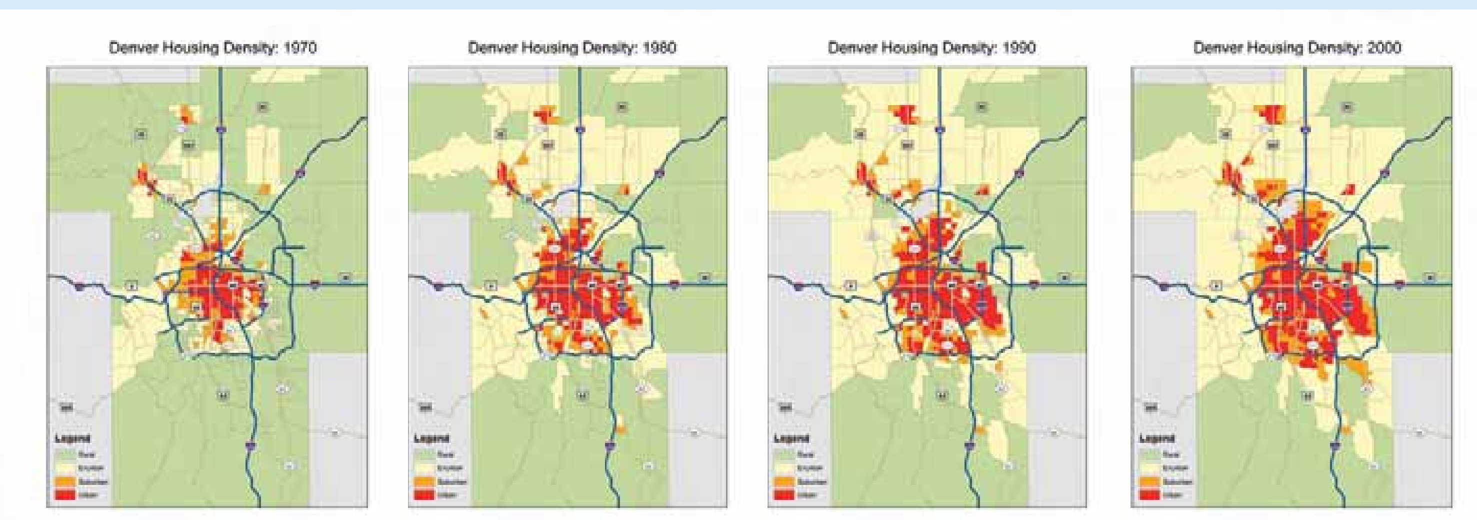
In 1999, Forest City Development was hired to implement the plan laid out in the Green Book. Construction of the site began in 2001; as of year-end 2005, the Stapleton Redevelopment Area had 6,100 residents, 2,300 homes, 13,300 employees, and 6.4 million square feet of non-residential space. This represents just over 20 percent of the project's estimated residential build out and over 33 percent of the non-residential build out.[4] At the same time, construction of the infrastructure was 40 percent complete, at a cost of nearly $330 million.[5]

With one notable exception, Forest City Development has succeeded in translating their new urbanism design principles into reality at Stapleton. The exception is the Quebec Square shopping center which includes a Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Sam's Club. These big box stores seem contrary to the ideals of new urbanism and were never mentioned in the Green Book.[6] But Tom Gleason, the project's vice president for public relations, explains this was a necessary financial boost. And even these stores are set on a standard street grid with sidewalks and trees to encourage pedestrian traffic.[7] According to Hank Baker, a senior vice president at Forest City Stapleton, "Quebec Square, which opened in 2002, brings in $8 million annually in property and sales taxes, nearly seven times the amount from the project's first 1,000 homes."[8]

A report published on September 20, 2006, says that since the redevelopment began in 1996, Stapleton has generated $5.7 billion in fiscal impact to the Metro-Denver area, with an estimated total $36.3 billion impact through build out. In addition, the Stapleton redevelopment has been credited with spurring economic activity in surrounding neighborhoods, as businesses are rushing in to improve run-down areas around Stapleton and capitalize on the appeal of the trendy new neighborhood.[9]

Stapleton has received additional praise for being a part of the national Energy Star program promoting energy efficient housing. The project also has a "sustainability director," advising on energy conserving materials and techniques along with saving water in new construction.[10] Will Coyne, the land-use advocate for Environment Colorado, has praised Stapleton as "one of the best examples of 'smart growth' in the Denver region."[11] To date, Stapleton has won ten national and international awards for categories ranging from "urban enrichment" to environmental sustainability, quality land use, and civic–corporate cooperation.

The Growing Rockies: Denver




Aerial photo of the Stapleton redevelopment, courtesy of ForestCity Development Inc.

The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.

We stand for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environment, and the preservation of our built legacy.[14]

Also included in the "Charter for the New Urbanism" are more specific design elements that encourage "livable" communities. Livable communities are rich in racial and economic diversity, promote walkability and offer mass transit alternatives, are densely populated, and incorporate mixed land use that puts commercial, residential, and recreational space all in close proximity.

Livable communities are not just about improving the quality of life for their residents. According to Bruce Katz at the Brookings Institution, high-density and mixed use are economically beneficial. Katz argues that the healthiest municipal economies are a product of service industries driven by human capital, and the most talented workers are attracted to cities with vibrant city centers and a high quality of life.[15] Further, densely populated labor forces that live in close proximity to their jobs are shown to be more productive, as indicated by increased patent activity.[16]

The new urbanism movement is becoming more well known throughout the United States, but not everyone is on board. Critics of new urbanism and smart growth either doubt the effectiveness of top-down policies or question the need to halt urban sprawl at all. Many new urbanism projects that promised mixed-use, livable communities are struggling to fulfill their vision. Some new urbanist communities have had to accept large commercial enterprises such as a chain hotel or "big box" store to prop up the economy of the development.[17] This is antithetical to the new urbanist value of small, unique establishments. Some Rockies citizens have voiced their frustration on newspaper websites, feeling betrayed by the new urbanist hype. In response to an article about a struggling new urbanism Project in New Mexico, one resident of the community wrote, "'New Urbanism' is nothing more than a marketing buzzword that goes next to pretty pictures of people strolling through a leafy marketplace. Developers cannot create a village. Only people can." Another writes: "'New Urbanism' is a fresh and shiny new name for purposes of marketing, but it's the same old sprawl."[18]

Other critics point out desirable effects of sprawl. According to the Colorado Springs Gazette, low-density housing means, "hard-working people don't have to be wealthy to claim a piece of the American Dream."[19] An article from the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) notes that "sprawl has one major thing going for it: people like it."[20] Many interpret sprawl as the free market successfully addressing people's tastes and preferences, in this case, for low-density, suburban housing.

New urbanism is a relatively new trend in urban development and has yet to prove itself as the answer to worries about urban and suburban growth in the Rockies. But as more people move into the region, increasing numbers of municipalities are encouraging smart growth and new urbanism projects. Western cities will serve as testing grounds for various policy and design combinations to improve the quality of life in the West.

Retirement Communities

Census figures from the 2005 American Community Survey show an increase in the percent of the national population aged 65 and over. The elderly (65+) population in the U.S. grew from 31.2 million in 1990 to 34.8 million in 2005.[21] This increase is not simply a function of population growth in general, but also of the "graying" of the population, with 65+ year olds rising from 4.1 percent of the total population in 1900 to 12.1 percent in 2005.[22] The U.S. Census Bureau predicts a major jump in the proportion of elderly beginning in 2011 as the baby boomers turn 65, with the older population reaching 72 million, or 19.6 percent of the total population, by 2030.[23]

Of the nine census divisions, the South Atlantic Division has the largest elderly population (Figure 5), but the Mountain Division, composed of the same eight states as the State of the Rockies Project study region, experienced the highest proportionate growth in elderly population from 1990 to 2005 at 45.4 percent (Table 3).[24] Within the Rockies states, Nevada showed the highest growth in elderly population at 109.7 percent, which was also the highest growth rate in the nation.[25] The highest actual 65+ population in the Rockies, however, was in Arizona, at 735,397 elderly residents in 2005 (Figure 6).[26] The Phoenix–Mesa–Scottsdale MSA has both the highest elderly population of any MSA in the West and had the highest growth in the 65+ population from 2000 to 2005.[27] Table 4 shows the 65+ population and growth among the Western MSA's.

Population size and growth are not the only important attributes of this demographic trend. The specific characteristics of the elderly population are also in transition. As a whole, the elderly are now more educated, wealthier, and healthier than previous generations. The median income for the 65+ population has increased from $12,882 in 1967 to $28,722 (inflation adjusted to 2005 dollars).[28] In addition, advances in medicine mean that the elderly are living longer and are more physically active.[29] The relative health and wealth of today's elderly population, compared to past generations, may explain the decline in nursing home residency (down 2.1 percent between 1990 and 2000) as well as contribute to the popularity of the Rockies as a location for retirement.[30] The agreeable climate and open spaces appeal to an active population.[31]

Master-planned, age-restricted housing is gaining a larger share of the housing market for the elderly demographic. According to the American Housing Survey, a regular report on housing statistics conducted by the Census Bureau and Department of Housing and Urban Development, the number of households in age-restricted communities increased by 639,000 between 2001 and 2005.[32] As of 2005, 7 percent of households age 55 or older lived in age-restricted communities.[33] The share is much higher in Western MSAs; the 2002 American Housing Survey profile of Phoenix showed that 96,000 households age 55 or higher were in age-restricted communities—25 percent of all households age 55 and over.[34]

Master-planned retirement communities are a relatively new trend

Figure 6
Growth in 65+ Population from 2000 to 2005
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey

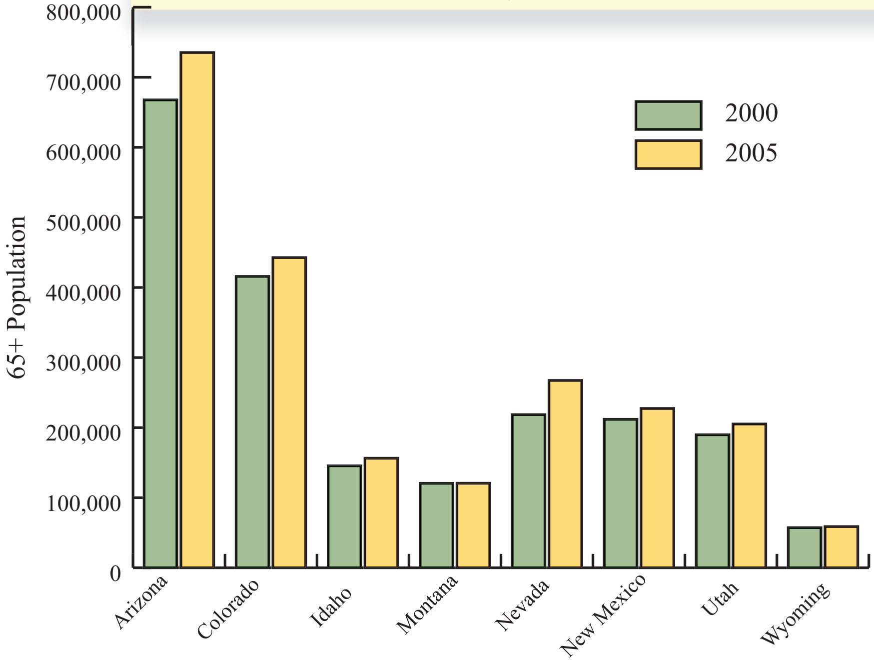


Figure 5
Growth in 65+ Population from 2000 to 2005
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey

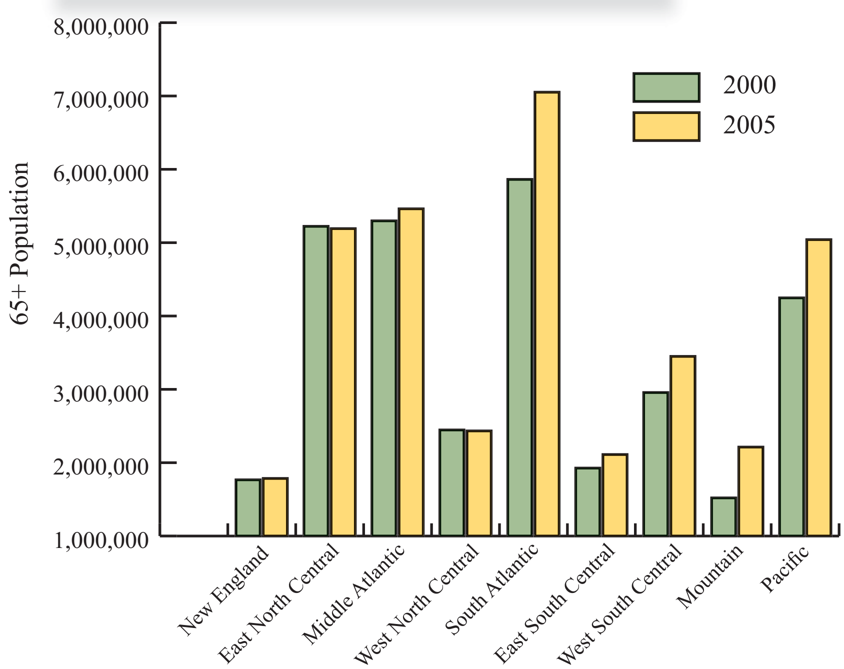


Table 3
Growth in 65+ Population from 2000 to 2005
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey

Census Division	Percent Change
New England	1.0%
Middle Atlantic	-0.6%
East North Central	3.1%
West North Central	-0.5%
South Atlantic	20.3%
East South Central	9.6%
West South Central	16.6%
Mountain	45.4%
Pacific	18.7%

Table 4
Growth in 65+ Population from 2000 to 2005
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey

MSA	65+ population 2000	65+ Population 2005	Actual Change	Percent Change
St. George	15,343	19,410	4,067	27%
Las Vegas-Paradise	146,899	179,150	32,251	22%
Reno-Sparks	36,243	43,485	7,242	20%
Santa Fe	13,903	16,304	2,401	17%
Coeur d'Alene	13,345	15,605	2,260	17%
Yuma	26,456	30,821	4,365	16%
Farmington	10,326	12,000	1,674	16%
Provo-Orem	24,312	28,230	3,918	16%
Las Cruces	18,512	21,276	2,764	15%
Prescott	36,816	42,133	5,317	14%
Flagstaff	8,143	9,184	1,041	13%
Boise City-Nampa	46,161	51,554	5,393	12%
Greeley	16,240	18,042	1,802	11%
Idaho Falls	10,173	11,298	1,125	11%
Colorado Springs	46,327	51,302	4,975	11%
Fort Collins-Loveland	24,037	26,606	2,569	11%
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale	388,150	423,082	34,932	9%
Grand Junction	17,642	19,014	1,372	8%
Tucson	119,487	128,456	8,969	8%
Albuquerque	82,068	88,116	6,048	7%
Denver-Aurora	194,064	206,835	12,771	7%
Ogden-Clearfield	38,440	40,504	2,064	5%
Cheyenne	9,351	9,779	428	5%
Salt Lake City	77,101	80,396	3,295	4%
Boulder	22,670	23,477	807	4%
Pocatello	8,445	8,733	288	3%
Missoula	9,585	9,829	244	3%
Logan	7,860	7,922	62	1%
Pueblo	21,456	21,210	-246	-1%
Great Falls	11,248	11,081	-167	-1%
Casper	8,424	8,203	-221	-3%
Billings	18,851	18,266	-585	-3%

Community Profile: Sun Lakes, AZ

Characteristics of the Development

Sun Lakes is a "resort-style active adult community" located in the southern outskirts of Phoenix. Encompassing roughly 3,500 acres and home to approximately 16,200 residents,[1] the community is restricted to those 55 and older (although a limited number of units can be sold to those 40 and older). In 2000, the median resident age of Sun Lakes was 69.[2] The development features 14 different models of homes, accommodating a variety of needs and income levels.[3]

Sun Lakes caters to the "active adult" demographic, boasting 45 holes of golf, 16 tennis courts, stocked fishing lakes, swimming pools, a health club, and a softball field. In addition, the community has three pharmacies within the development, a health center with several doctors and specialists on site, and more extensive health facilities within 5 miles in metropolitan Phoenix. The close proximity to Phoenix also allows Sun Lakes residents access to arts and leisure centers, fine dining, and other amenities of a large city. Sun Lakes is a good model of the type of high-quality retirement communities springing up throughout the West.[4]

Ed Robson and the Development of Sun Lakes

Development mogul Edward J. Robson started Sun Lakes in 1972. Previously, Robson worked as Director of Corporate Sales for the Del Webb Corporation, a development company similarly marketing to the "active retiree." The Sun Lakes development is the centerpiece in his prolific development career. The initial concept billed the once-remote development as a low-budget alternative to luxury retirement communities, and the business model has evolved with the market. Sun Lakes began with several double-wide trailers, but now features homes for a wide range of incomes, many selling for $300,000+ and a small portion for over $1 million. In 2005, Sun Lakes "sold its last new home and closed models for good after 33 years and 11,000 sales."[5]

The aging of America is fast fueling a wide variety of new community responses. Often the results are housing developments "gated" and restricted by age, while informal self-selection leads to most residents having similar backgrounds and interests. Conscious efforts to infuse diversity through a range of housing types and costs, from apartments to condominiums, garden homes, and single "family" residences, help mitigate what otherwise might be highly restrictive communities within the Rockies urban and suburban areas. Ed Robson has been a pioneer in the Rockies, designing and building housing complexes that fit the rapidly changing demographics of the Rockies Region.

in development in the United States. Prior to 1950, retirement communities did not exist; the compact, mixed-use layout of older cities meant that the elderly could live comfortably with limited mobility.[35] In the post-WWII era of expanding cities, however, the elderly have often found themselves stranded. Whereas groceries, pharmacies, and other daily needs were at one time in walking distance, for many they now can only by accessed by car—a means of conveyance not every elderly person can utilize.[36] Often the only choice left for seniors is a retirement community or assisted living center.

Occasionally there arise unplanned communities comprised mainly of retired and elderly people. These are called "naturally occurring retirement communities" (NORCs). A NORC is an area, often in sections of older cities, where the majority of residents is increasingly elderly.[37] Mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly designs allow residents to easily transition from an auto-dependent lifestyle to a retirement lifestyle. Originally the NORC may have been diverse in age, but as the residents aged and remained in their homes, other older individuals found the area appealing. NORCs, however, occur with less frequency since the decentralization of cities began after WWII.[38]

Today, master-planned retirement communities offer an alternative housing option that reflects the need for functional and appealing retirement amenities. Developers target the new elderly demographic by shedding the stale "shuffleboard" image and marketing an active and engaging way of life, complete with golf courses, sports leagues, academic courses, social groups, comfortable climate, and access to the outdoors.

Retirement communities are an attractive housing alternative for the elderly population, but are they suitable for everyone? A 2005 Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP) study outlines several criteria for measuring how "livable" a community is for the elderly. The master-planned retirement communities now prevalent in the West satisfy most of the requirements. Most retirement communities provide a means for seniors to be engaged both physically and mentally and offer a sense of community and security.[39] They also make for pedestrian friendly communities and have health facilities in close proximity. A 2002 report from the National Older Adult Housing Survey showed that senior citizens in age-restricted communities benefit from more accommodating housing features (e.g., first floor bedrooms) and a higher prevalence of community amenities and activities than their counterparts in mixed-age communities.[40] The specialized design of retirement communities is an obvious advantage over mixed-age communities.

Age-restricted developments, however, fall short of the ideal elderly housing situation in two ways. First, they are not always affordable. While some developments offer several models to accommodate a variety of income levels, the population influx in the West in particular is driving up housing values—an especially difficult challenge for older populations who often rely on fixed incomes. Second, a 2005 AARP survey shows that 74 percent of people over 50 wish to stay in their current residence.[41] Age-restricted communities are by definition a place that one cannot have grown up in and are often depicted as "destination" accommodations, requiring a significant move. In a letter put before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, the AARP voiced the challenge America faces "to create livable communities, with appropriate and affordable housing, adequate options for mobility, and the community feature and services that can facilitate personal independence and continued engagement in civic and social life."[42] Master-planned retirement communities satisfy many of these characteristics, but are not fit for or available to everyone.

Gated Communities

The American Housing Survey (AHS) refers to gated communities as "secured" communities and defines them as "residential communities in which public access by nonresidents is restricted, usually by physical boundaries, such as gates, walls, and fences, or through private security."[43]

The American Housing Survey provides the most comprehensive statistics about gated communities in the United States. National-level surveys are conducted every other year; the most up-to-date statistics are for 2005. The national survey also provides statistics broken out for the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West census regions. The West Region includes the eight-state Rockies study region, plus California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii. In addition to national and regional data, the AHS provides detailed housing profiles for select MSAs throughout the country. Since 2000, the AHS has produced surveys for two MSAs in the eight-state region—Phoenix in 2002 and Denver in 2005.

Table 4
Number of Secured Communities by Region and Selected Rockies MSAs
Source: American Housing Survey

	Total units with access secured with walls or fences (thousands)	Percent of Total Units with access secured with walls or fences
Area		
National (2005)	6925	6.30%
Northeast	526	2.50%
Midwest	441	1.80%
South	3117	7.80%
West	2841	11.90%
Phoenix (2002)	202	17.30%
Denver (2005)	62	7.20%

Community Profile: Yellowstone Club, MT

The Yellowstone Club is the epitome of a luxury gated community in the Rockies. Located on 13,400 acres near the northwest border of Yellowstone National Park, at completion the development will accommodate no more than 864 residential properties. As of February 2007, the club had 250 members, each paying upwards of $3 million in membership fees and building costs to be a part of the development.[1] Recently, Forbes declared one of the homes in the Yellowstone Club to be the most expensive house in the world—worth $155 million.

Amenities are the selling point for the Yellowstone Club. The development claims to be the only private ski and golf resort in the world, and also features premier fishing waters. Membership is by invitation only, and so far Bill Gates, Jack Kemp, and Dan Quayle are among the select few who have accepted.[2]

Construction of the Yellowstone Club has not been without protest. Joining the typical critics of gated communities as a whole are environmentalists who cite a multitude of violations. Opponents argue the development's transgressions include dumping dredge material into a protected wetlands and polluting streams that feed the Gallatin River. For disrupting the wetlands, Yellowstone Club developer Tim Blixseth paid $1.8 million in fines, the highest penalty ever assessed for an environmental transgression. Blixseth did not admit guilt, but opted to pay the fine rather than endure drawn-out litigation.[3]

Nonetheless, the Yellowstone Club is an economic boon to the area. The development directly employs 500 workers and 1,000 subcontractors, enough that the Yellowstone Club purchased a nearby motel to house workers in light of a housing shortage.[4] Developer Blixseth estimates that the development injects $200 million into the economy annually.[5]

Gated communities have different meanings throughout the Rockies. In urban and suburban areas they offer residents added security and camaraderie among those of similar age, background, and interests. In rural resort areas, the "gates" stand more for exclusivity and "separation" of the haves from the have-nots. Prestige, pampering, and world-class recreation opportunities often sell to high-wealth individuals and families. The resulting regional injection of jobs and income can come at the price of resentment by those the gates "lock out."

Table 4 shows the AHS data for the number of housing units with "community access secured with walls or fences." The data show the West has the highest number of housing units in gated communities as a percent of total housing units. The West and the South are associated with an area commonly referred to as the "Sunbelt," a popular location for gated retirement communities.[44] The percentage of units in gated communities in the Phoenix MSA is well above the national average, while Denver closely reflects the national average. Although far from comprehensive, the AHS data are the best available statistics for analysis of national and regional trends regarding gated communities.

It is a common perception that gated communities are the bastions of the wealthy and white. But a detailed look at the AHS data shows that these developments are also popular among the middle-class and minorities. An analysis of the 2001 national AHS data by Sanchez and Lang showed two distinct patterns. The first was the familiar trend of wealthy, white homeowners, living in access-controlled communities (requiring a special entry system such as an entry code, key card, or security guard approval).[45] The second pattern, however, was a stark contrast. Sanchez and Lang observed a large instance of units occupied by middle-income minorities who rented rather than owned their houses and lived in gated communities that did not necessarily have the rigorous access controls of the more up-scale developments.[46] Sanchez and Lang conclude by remarking that the desire for the security of gated communities pervades many social classes, not just the wealthy.[47]

Gated communities are appealing for many reasons. They provide a feeling of security, the comfort of racial and economic homogeneity, and the satisfaction of exclusivity.[48] However residents must be willing to adhere to strict building codes and social guidelines for the privilege of home in a "privatopia."[49] Depending on the development, homeowners' associations can control everything from the color of houses to the number of guests allowed in residences and what home furnishings can be visible through windows.[50] Residents tolerate intrusive policies to maintain social order as well as protect the value of their property.[51] Strict building maintenance regulations ensure that the physical deterioration of a neighbor's property will not affect the value of an adjacent property. Gated communities reflect the desire for a utopian enclave.

Gated communities draw considerable criticism from sociologists and the excluded population. Common arguments claim such developments catalyze segregation and perpetuate social conflict and class divisiveness.[52] In the book Behind the Gates: Life, Security and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America, Setha Low sums up the position stating, "gated residential communities intensify social segregation, racism, and exclusionary land use practices."[53] Exacerbating the problem is communities' ability to fund and regulate themselves. In Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream, Duany et al. explain, "the people in gated communities are the ones consistently voting down necessary taxes. Not one penny more to support the inner city, schools, parks, or even for the maintenance of the public realm at large. Meanwhile, these people often pay hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars a month to their homeowners' association to maintain their personal archipelago. The rest of the world is expected to take care of itself."[54] Gated communities are thus insulated from problems affecting their surroundings and further alienate those not living within their walls.

A similar dissatisfaction with gated communities, especially the ultra-exclusive developments, is echoed throughout the Rockies. Natural amenities make the West an attractive location for high-end developments, including several on the Forbes list of the most expensive gated communities.[55] A 2002 article in High Country News explains that residents of one particular luxury gated development in Montana isolate themselves from the community at large—they don't shop at local establishments or participate in community functions or meetings.[56] The developers and residents of the gated community defend themselves explaining that they donate to local non-profits and provide added financial benefits through increased property taxes and jobs for local contractors and service workers to maintain the golf course and country club.[57] Experts in the field of urbanism, however, contend that gated communities are usually economically and racially homogenous. The lack of diversity in such developments promulgates intolerance and complacency toward issues outside the community.[58]

As gated communities gain popularity in the West, more citizens and municipalities will grapple with the pros and cons of these developments. Are the increased financial benefits worth the potential for social strife?

Conclusion

The Rockies' population is growing at an alarming rate-9 percent from 2000 to 2005, nearly 4.5 times the national growth rate. Examining how the growing population in housing itself, namely new urbanism projects, retirement communities, and gated communities, illuminates specific characterisitics of the current population boom. The population influx and the associated housing trends change not only the physical size and composition of the region's urban centers, but also the character and "livability" of the West. Understanding the intricacies of these dynamic changes will help us to better anticipate the future of this region in transition.

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