



## Regional Planners Take On Global Warming

Single-family homes on medium to large lots make up the majority of homes in the Sacramento region. Nowhere in the six-country region—from Sacramento to El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba—is there a downtown core that includes high-density apartments and condos near employment.

In Sacramento, there were 56,000 people living in the downtown in 1950. Today, there is roughly half that.

While the city launched an initiative a year ago to build 10,000 new housing units in the next decade, there is little financial incentive to do so.

Planners are doing their best to set goals for compact density that include new housing being close to employment and schools, shopping and parks to decrease miles traveled, but the region is an example of how sprawl affects travel.

In the six-county region, density numbers tell the story: 79 percent of homes are for single families with 57 percent of the lots greater than 5,500 sq. ft.

“Our region has a lot of low-density, single-family development,” said Kacey Lizon, planning manager for Sacramento Area Council of Governments, the six-county region’s transportation planning agency.

Because the area is so spread out, most people traveled 18 miles per day, on average, in 2012.

Weekday miles in regional centers and corridors averaged only about 13 miles per day per person as opposed to 29 miles per day person in rural areas.

An Advancing Wellness poll by the California Wellness Foundation and Field Research found a strong link between the level of opportunity, such as employment, people have in their neighborhood and their sense of overall wellness.

“One aspect of climate issues is getting more housing at an efficient density that has access to employment and services,” said Lizon. “Studies show that large segments of the population are looking for smaller homes and different types of housing because they want it or need it. Now we need to diversify.”

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Fortunately, planners aren't the only ones envisioning compact development.

Building high-density communities near transit, schools, parks and shopping to cut down on greenhouse gases is a goal of Mutual Housing California.

The Sacramento-based nonprofit has been a green leader since 2002 when it installed the first photovoltaic system at a multifamily development in the Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

Mutual Housing at Spring Lake in Woodland, Calif., is the first zero-net energy community developed by the nonprofit—and the first given the US Dept. of Energy Zero Energy Ready Home certification for a multifamily rental in the nation.

“From higher density development to zero-net energy, we have been building in a sustainable way for almost three decades,” said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing's chief executive officer.

Even with community gardens, computer labs and meeting centers, the average density of Mutual Housing developments is 17.5 units per acre.

Plans for at least two higher density developments in Sacramento's urban areas are in the works.

Located on 3.28 acres, the Woodland development has 62 apartments and townhomes for agricultural workers from the fields, processing plants and packing houses, or a 19-unit density.

The second phase of the development, which is in the planning stage, will have 21 units per acre.

Like the rest of the region, nearly 64 percent of the 20,277 single-family homes in Woodland are on their own lots. Only 36 percent are multi-family homes of two or more units.

The site in the Spring Lake section allows for density of up to 25 units per acre.

“Our general plan calls for a variety of housing types,” said Dan Sokolow, City of Woodland senior planner. “Mutual Housing's current development is nearly 20 per acre, so it's very consistent with that part of the plan.”

Mutual Housing at Spring Lake has many other elements of the Woodland general plan. It is near a bus stop and is in walking distance to amenities such as parks, grocery stores and schools.

With climate change, every sustainable aspect of development helps. Mutual Housing is in the process of converting many of its multifamily housing communities to solar producers and Mutual Housing residents are becoming leaders in energy-conservation efforts.

Working together, planners and nonprofits like Mutual Housing are making a difference.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops, operates and advocates for sustainable rental housing for the diversity of the region's households.

A member of NeighborWorks America—a congressionally chartered nonprofit organization that supports community development nationwide—Mutual Housing has more than 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through its focus on community, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, leadership-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.

For information, visit [www.mutualhousing.com](http://www.mutualhousing.com).