

Infill Development



The Preferred Growth Scenario of the Horizon Plan focuses activities into regional and community growth centers that include a mix of activities for people to live, work and play. Infill and redevelopment in the core area neighborhoods

are encouraged by developing vacant land, under-utilized or substandard areas in order to attract new residents, promote efficient use of existing infrastructure and preserve existing neighborhoods. Infill development and redevelopment in the Central Business District (CBD) in downtown Baton Rouge will increase commercial/office and retail activity, and providing of housing in the area will promote and reinforce a “24 hour” activity center.

What is infill development?

The development of pockets of vacant land or structures within predominantly developed areas is known as infill development. After decades of suburban flight, many people are deciding to move back to the city to take advantage of the close proximity to amenities and conveniences. Housing construction in the central city is occurring on vacant or redeveloped land to accommodate this urban renewal. Historic buildings are also being rehabilitated for new uses.

Negative aspects about life in the suburbs, such as traffic congestion and lengthy commutes, are contributing to an energized housing market in many cities. Various cities are using creative financing mechanisms to allow infill development which can increase the property-tax base and preserve open space by capitalizing on available land near work, shopping, recreation and transit centers.

What are the benefits of infill?

Urban infill housing construction includes a range of residential uses consisting of single-family houses, townhouses, apartment buildings, condominiums, lofts and co-ops. By focusing on infill development rather than the development of greenfields

we can help to reduce automobile travel time, traffic congestion, air pollution, infrastructure costs and household travel costs.

Many cities are planning for mixed-use communities, which include apartments and townhouses with single-family homes. This mix of incomes and people contribute to a vibrant neighborhood life. Typically infill development projects attempt to design spaces around people’s needs. Narrow streets lined by porches and trees provide easily navigable paths along a regular block pattern.

What are the barriers to infill?

Despite the great potential of urban infill projects to provide centrally located housing, there are several obstacles to these kinds of projects.

Restrictive Zoning

Inflexible zoning and building codes may inhibit creative infill projects. The approval process itself may favor larger urban fringe developers. Many land use plans separate commercial, residential, retail and other uses which creates isolated development and increases the probability that some areas will be sustained while others will fall into decline. Setback requirements favor wide streets that inhibit denser “corner store” development.

Acquisition and Development Financing

Concerns over the financial feasibility of infill projects can sometimes halt a good development concept.

Banks may be reluctant to lend money and developers can experience high land

costs and environmental clean-up fees, among other incurred costs. Mortgage lenders may perceive nontraditional mixed use projects as risky investments because they are not very common. The separation between residential and commercial loan functions may also complicate the review process.



Infrastructure Conditions

Developers of infill projects often face deteriorating infrastructure in older areas of the city where upgrade or replacement expenses can be daunting.

Community Involvement

Local opposition may pose challenges for infill development. The level and type of opposition depends on the neighborhood character. A common concern raised by surrounding residents is that an infill project will adversely affect their property values, although many studies have found no adverse effects of infill development on nearby properties. Other concerns include the preservation of community homogeneity and anticipated reduction in service levels. The lack of trust and understanding among stakeholder groups can be bridged through shared discourse on the cost of sprawl and the benefits infill development has to offer. Local officials can lend a hand in improving communication and education. Local officials can lend a hand in improving communication and education.

What is the Horizon Plan doing to promote infill development?

Infill and redevelopment is the Horizon Plan Preferred Growth Scenario and is implemented in a variety of ways. The Small Planned Unit Development (SPUD) ordinance, adopted in 1987, created the opportunity to encourage the development of large tracts of land as residential and/or commercial planned neighborhoods or communities within the urbanized area. A SPUD can maintain and efficiently utilize existing infrastructure and promote fiscally responsible growth that can be efficiently served by infrastructure.

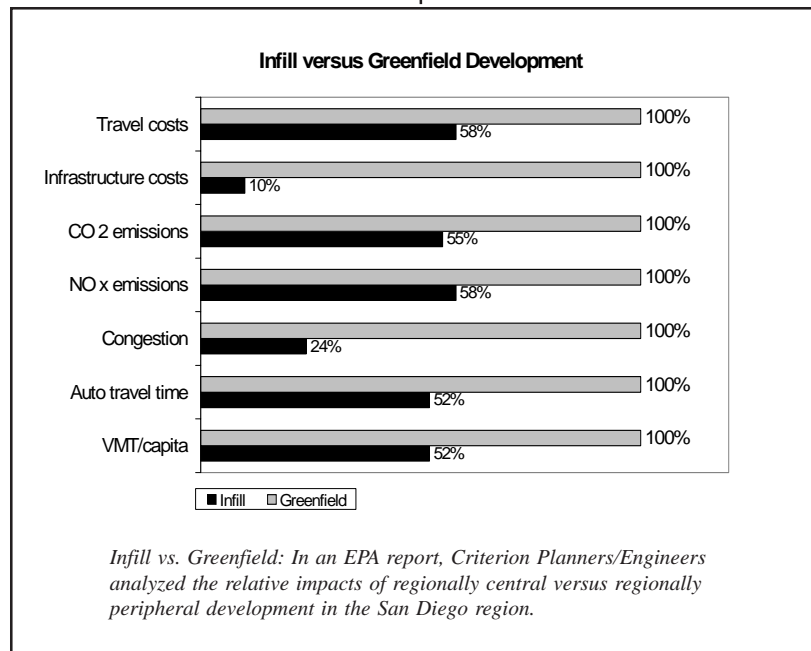
Office and Commercial land use categories and new zoning classifications provide the opportunity for infill development serving the needs of the community. Downtown infill development in Baton Rouge is occurring through the efforts of the Downtown Development District and the implementation of Plan Baton Rouge. This master plan is a ten to fifteen year development blueprint for the city center. Projects include the renovation and operation of the old Auto Hotel as an art center along with several other infrastructure and aesthetic improvements.

There are several economic incentive programs included in the Horizon Plan. Businesses locating in redevelopment areas may qualify for the Louisiana Enterprise Zone (EZ) Program. Benefits of the EZ Program include a \$2,500 state tax credit for each new job created during the first five years of business. In addition, the Restoration Tax Abatement (RTA) is a tax reduction program available for renovation of historic structures.

The Baton Rouge Brownfields Program is administered by the Planning Commission to encourage the redevelopment of properties that have been idle or abandoned due to the fear of real or perceived environmental contamination. In October, 2000 the Planning Commission received a grant for \$200,000 from the US Environmental Protection Agency for a pilot project. As of 2009, the City-Parish has dispersed more than \$1.3 million in assessment and cleanup funding and has leveraged almost \$24 million in redevelopment funding for brownfields sites.

What are some other possible programs that we could implement?

Additional programs not already in place would provide more incentives for redevelopment. Density bonuses allow developers to build extra units beyond allowed densities if they meet certain goals of infill development. Transfer of development rights may be used to reduce development in rural areas in exchange for increasing development in the city by allowing developers to purchase development rights in outlying areas for each housing unit they want to build in the city.



Where rehabilitation of existing infrastructure becomes necessary, there are a number of funding policies that can mitigate the expense of needed infrastructure improvements. Funds can come from the capital budget or special taxes that are funded directly back into infrastructure projects. A particular financing method is the creation of a tax increment financing (TIF) district where property tax revenue is redirected to infrastructure projects in that district instead of being added to a general fund. Finding ways to finance the improvements is an investment in the future.

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