

Research You Can Use

Does Growth Management Work? Program Evaluation at Its Best. It's obviously more fun to create new policies and programs than to evaluate existing ones. After all, what administrator wants his program declared "ineffective"? But there's a downside to that attitude. Without much evidence of effectiveness, practicing planners have embraced techniques like mixed use zoning, transfer of development rights, density bonuses, building code revisions, and street connectivity guidelines. They all seemed like good ideas when they first appeared. But do they work?

In this column, the first of a series that will appear every other month in this space, I will highlight some of the research studies on this and other subjects published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and elsewhere (even unpublished research if it's relevant). What the studies featured in this column will have in common is a practical bent. They will address topics that you, as practitioners, want to know about.

Growth management is one of the few areas where program effectiveness has been seriously evaluated. Try googling the names of planning professors like Arthur C. Nelson, FAICP, Gerrit Knaap, and Rolf Pendall (combined with appropriate key words), and you come across almost a dozen published assessments of growth management. All told, perhaps two dozen peer-reviewed evaluations appear in the planning and urban studies literature.

Peer review is the universal quality control standard of the research community. With expert reviewers, or so the theory goes, someone is going to catch blunders of study design or interpretation of results. Most studies highlighted in this column will be peer reviewed.

A forthcoming *JAPA* evaluation, "Growth Management Revisited: A Reassessment of its Efficacy, Price Effects, and Impacts on Metropolitan Growth Patterns," stands out as particularly helpful to practitioners. John Landis of the University of California, Berkeley, is the author, and his article appears in the Winter 2007 issue. In it, Landis answers three core questions about growth management:

- To what extent do different tools affect the amount, pace, or location of urban growth?
- How much do the resulting housing supply limitations raise housing prices?
- To what extent do growth management programs displace growth from more restrictive to less restrictive localities, leading to such negative outcomes as sprawl and wasteful commuting?

One strength of Landis's study is that different growth management techniques are evaluated separately. From a long list of smart growth implementation tools that are used in California, the article considers five individually: residential caps, adequate public facilities ordinances, urban growth boundaries, annexation controls, and required rezoning approval by a supermajority of voters.



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Other program evaluations often lump different growth management techniques together, as if APFOs were the same as UGBs. Some evaluations compare "growth management" states or localities with their unmanaged counterparts. But, while Portland, Oregon, and Orlando,

Florida, both have programs, their approaches are entirely different. And the impacts are certainly different. Any study that equates them has a serious apples-oranges problem.

Another strength is Landis's use of a quasi-experimental research design. Like a lab experiment, a quasi-experiment makes use of a control group. But unlike rats, cities cannot be randomly assigned to various groups. What Landis does is to carefully match a group of cities with growth management programs to cities without such programs. In that way, differences in growth rates can reasonably be attributed to the programs themselves.

Some growth management studies have failed to control at all for differences among jurisdictions. One study compared Portland to Atlanta, cities that differ in a million respects other than growth management. Other evaluations have used esoteric statistical techniques to control for differences. An example from one study: "The relationships in equation (1) describe a system of simultaneous equations that are contemporaneously correlated and related through the endogenous variables." Come again?

The results. Landis discovers that three techniques—residential caps, annexation controls, and requirements for a supermajority approval—significantly limit growth in the cities that adopt them. The other two techniques—APFOs and UGBs—apparently do not. He also learns that regulatory measures that strictly limit new housing production have the effect of raising housing prices.

He concludes, however, that growth management is not generally to blame for California's outrageous housing prices and rents. Depending on the particular programs and circumstances, growth management measures may have the result of shifting growth to nearby communities. But they also may result in more infill development in the cities that adopt the measures. So the evaluation is filled with both good and bad news for growth management advocates.

Considering all the evidence (including earlier studies), says Landis, certain growth management techniques are more effective than others. It all depends on how the programs are structured and administered. To know what works and what doesn't, you will have to read the *JAPA* article.

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