

# Issue Brief: Supporting Infill Development



HOUSING & BUILDING  
ASSOCIATION  
OF COLORADO SPRINGS

Colorado Springs has considerable vacant and underutilized land that can be developed for housing and other purposes. With housing needs continuing to grow, the City should have stronger policies and planning processes to encourage infill and high-density development. This includes both single-family homes and multifamily projects like apartments, condos and townhomes.

Over the years, infill has been considered a desirable housing project type; however, several obstacles make infill projects more challenging within Colorado Springs. Neighborhood opposition often is amplified for infill projects. Opponents of an infill project typically raise traffic, public safety, open space and view concerns. In several situations, there has been a sense of entitlement to the vacant land by the neighbors. Elected officials and members of appointed boards and commission often claim to support infill, but during public hearings, their support weakens, putting opposition ahead of property rights, smart urban development, and the City's housing needs.

## Addressing Concerns about Infill

Colorado Springs officials have recently supported more infill development, especially higher density residential infill through PlanCOS. Community leaders need to understand that the common complaints against infill and high-density projects are often inaccurate. For example, opponents have claimed that infill rental apartments bring higher crime rates and reduced home values to neighborhoods, but neither claim is based on fact. Studies conducted by Harvard University and the University of Arkansas have found that

apartments and multifamily developments actually increase overall property values in surrounding neighborhoods and reduce crime.

The misperception of increased crime comes from how crime rates and police calls are tracked. Crime data typically does not separate

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by individual apartment address and instead lumps the data into a single location, making apartments appear to have higher crime activity. According to the University of Arkansas study, "subsidized multi-family housing has a positive effect on the sales prices of single-family within 1,000 feet and reduces the vulnerability of properties within 2,000 feet to property crime." The Harvard

study found that "when police data is analyzed on a per unit basis, the rate of police activity in apartment communities is no worse than single-family subdivisions, and in many cases, lower than single-family residential areas."

Another complaint is that infill causes overflow capacities in local schools; however, many urban schools in Colorado Springs are dealing with falling attendance. In this case, additional single-family homes would attract new residents with school-age children to our neighborhoods. If school overcrowding is a concern, multifamily projects typically attract single people, couples without children and empty nesters

Another concern is that infill puts stress on existing infrastructure—such as roads, utilities, and sewers—that had not been developed to support new housing needs. Governing bodies tend to require that all infrastructure deficiencies are resolved by the infill project—often making the infill project financially unfeasible. There is a balance that needs to be found between the infill development and the City to address the

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infrastructure deficiencies.

Colorado Springs officials should consider that partnering on infrastructure costs will allow needed housing to be developed and that the infrastructure improvements—especially for roads and traffic—will benefit the entire community. We understand that Colorado Springs Utilities is looking at how to partner on infrastructure upgrades for infill development, and we would encourage Council, acting as the CSU board, to support this effort.

It is important that City Council continues to support the work being done by the City's planning department and the development community as part of ReToolCOS. This process is working to update the City's zoning code to provide more flexible residential zoning to help expand housing choice and attainability in

the City and will also address zoning standards such as height, setbacks, and lot coverage that are typically at issue for infill developments. We hope that City councilmembers will support the ReToolCOS process and continue to look for ways to bring down the costs and barriers to development within the City.

Finally, the City should become more proactive in utilizing and encouraging infill development by engaging the current landowners of priority infill sites to take steps that would help in the future planning processes, such as advanced review and potential rezoning. Taking proactive steps with landowners and developers can make infill projects more feasible, attract investment and bring much needed housing to the City.

**HBA recommendations:** To accomplish these goals and to support infill development in Colorado Springs, the HBA believes that City Council members and City officials should:

- Understand the misperceptions of increased crime, traffic and strain on local schools often used as reasons to oppose infill developments and work with the community and developer to address these concerns.
- Consider partnering on infrastructure costs to allow needed housing to be developed, as well as the infrastructure improvements—especially for roads and traffic—that benefit the entire community.
- Support work being done by the City's planning department and the development community as part of ReToolCOS.
- Work to update the City's zoning code to provide more flexible residential zoning to help expand housing choice and attainability in the City.
- Address zoning standards such as height, setbacks, and lot coverage that are typically at issue for infill developments.
- Be more proactive in utilizing and encouraging infill development by engaging the current landowners of priority infill sites to take steps that would help in the future planning processes.

#### About the Housing & Building Association of Colorado Springs

The Housing & Building Association of Colorado Springs is a trade association that represents more than 500-member companies, including builders, developers, and remodelers, as well as trade contractors, materials suppliers, mortgage lenders, real estate agents, title companies, interior designers, architects, landscapers and beyond. The HBA and its members are community leaders and builders, contributing to the growth, prosperity and quality of life our exceptional community.

#### HBA Mission

The Housing & Building Association of Colorado Springs promotes policies that allow for the production of safe and affordable housing and enhances the environment for the housing and building industry in El Paso County.