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It's a Sprawl World After All

By Debra Hazel



Hasse

(Mark Your Calendars: [RealShare New Jersey](#) takes place Sept. 13 in New Brunswick, NJ)

GLASSBORO, NJ-With New Jersey rapidly running out of land, current zoning regulations have created a situation of sprawl and housing segregation that have worsened over the last 40 years and will continue to do so, according to a new study by **Rowan University's Geospatial Research Laboratory**.

The study, "Evidence of Persistent Exclusionary Effects of Land Use Policy within Historic and Projected Development Patterns in New Jersey," was conducted under a research contract with the Fair Share Housing Center and funded by a grant from the Fund for New Jersey. Among the conclusions was that even with the modest improvements resulting from the Fair Housing Act of 1985, which did promote a mix of housing choices near jobs, sprawl continues to worsen. That is due to a number of factors, says **John Hasse**, professor of geography and director of environmental studies at Rowan, and a co-author of the study.

"There are so many different things that contribute to how we develop land in the United States and New Jersey," Hasse tells GlobeSt.com. "In New Jersey we kind of let the cat out of the bag when we created zoning in the 1920s. We spread our people in a not very efficient way."

Unlike Europe, where homes are smaller and socialization often takes place in public plazas, the United States developed a car culture, with ever-larger homes becoming the crown jewel of possessions. This is particularly critical in New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the union. Residential development takes up 65% of the developed acres in the state, a 26.8% increase over the pre-1986 residential footprint, the report says. The population, in contrast, rose just 14% in the same

period. Most of the development did not take place in urban, "smart growth" areas, contributing to sprawl.

"The predominance of large lot residential subdivisions which current policy is producing is contrary to the objectives of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan to foster a balanced mix of housing, sound land planning, conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment," the report says. "By consuming practically all remaining residentially zoned land, large lot subdivisions are locking in a residential land use pattern that excludes many New Jersey households that cannot afford a large-lot single-family home the ability to live near their jobs."

Local politics also play a role, Hasse adds. "Every town has control over zoning," he notes. "It's a three-year cycle. You have people who have not had training in land use trying to make decisions for the short term. It's the dysfunction of home rule. It just doesn't work."

Ultimately, the report says, if current zoning is followed, a large majority of future residential development in both counties will be large-lot subdivisions in even greater proportion than past patterns, and housing growth will lag far behind job growth. The study focused on development patterns in Monmouth and Somerset Counties, which saw significant development from the 1970s through today.

"When a place like Somerset County zones for 16 times as many jobs as homes, the result is traffic gridlock from people driving long distances to work, destruction of farmland and forests, and racial and economic segregation," says **Fair Share Housing Center** executive director **Kevin Walsh** says in a statement.

Plus, New Jersey is simply running out of space, given that some 20% of the land area is in preservation. "We are in the last few decades of being able to do anything in New Jersey," Hasse says. "In two to three decades, there will be no private land left that's developable. We'll be the first state to run out of land."

But this pattern could be shifting, Hasse says. Glassboro is developing a new Main Street area, and New Brunswick has seen a huge boost in transit-oriented (a.k.a., urban) development.

"We realize we don't like sitting in traffic," he says. "We don't like sprawl. I see younger kids wanting to move to Philadelphia. The ideas of smart growth and new urban standards are starting to filter down."