



THE 10 PERCENT SOLUTION

It's expected the Atlanta region's population will grow 2 million by 2030. Planners point out, however, that all new residents could be comfortably accommodated with denser development in just a fraction of metro Atlanta's surface area – the region's major centers and transportation corridors. Major centers and corridors make up just 10 percent of metro Atlanta's land mass.

THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERYONE IN METRO ATLANTA.

What's so great about denser development?

Well designed denser development:

- **Stretches tax dollars.** It takes maximum advantage of existing water, sewer, school, police, and fire services.
- **Saves green spaces.** Sprawling development in the metro region consumed an average of 55 acres a day before the recent slowdown.
- **Saves money.** When people drive less, they spend less on gas and car maintenance.
- **Preserves air quality.** Because compact, denser development puts more homes, jobs, and stores closer together, it reduces the number of car trips.
- **Raises quality of life.** Fewer car trips mean less pressure on area roads. Shorter commutes mean more time for family and friends. Just as important, because well designed compact development puts more people in neighborhoods that encourage walking, it creates the vibrant street life and sense of community that are among the payoffs for urban living.
- **Boosts business productivity.** Sales and service stops are closer together. Workers waste less time in traffic.
- **Makes public transportation work** by putting more riders within reach of each stop.



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DESIGN MATTERS.

Both these neighborhoods have 11.7 dwelling units per acre. The neighborhood above makes walking easy. The car-oriented neighborhood below makes driving a necessity.



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Older Atlanta-area neighborhoods like this one provide an urban setting for graceful and even spacious homes. Yet they also include a variety of housing types and prices – single-family homes large or modest, apartments, townhomes, and condos – in districts whose population density ranges from eight to 60-plus persons per acre. Streets like this one were once typical of how we built cities and towns. Today, however, suburban-style growth has so spread metro Atlanta's population that the population density of an older neighborhood like this one is at least four times the regional average.

It's a numbers game

Simple arithmetic explains why many area residents find themselves driving long distances and fighting traffic for even simple errands. Stores that serve daily or weekly needs—a drug store, convenience store, or dry cleaner, for example—may need access to between 1,000 and 3,000 potential customers to be viable. A big-box home improvement store needs access to between 50,000 and 100,000 potential customers. In areas of sprawling development, their customers may be up to 15 miles away, with most or all of them having to drive the same major arterial road to get to the store.

MORE PEOPLE, MORE CHOICES FOR TRANSPORTATION

The denser the development, the more transportation choices people will have. How many people does it take to make public transportation work well? Here are averages from one widely accepted source:

Service level	Minimum dwelling units per acre needed to make service work	Equivalent population per acre
Bus once an hour	3 – 4	8 – 10.5
Bus every half hour	4.5 – 6	11.5 – 15.5
Bus every 10 minutes	7.5 – 10	19.5 – 26
Light rail (BeltLine)	9 – 12	23.5 – 31
Rapid rail (MARTA)	12 – 15	31 – 39

Source: Transit Cooperative Research Program



Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.

Sufficient density, like that imagined here along the BeltLine, creates transportation choices – in this case, light rail service.



Development Design Group, Inc.

The payoffs for dense development that puts residences near stores are convenience and an active, engaging street life.



Development Design Group, Inc.

Compact development frees land for greenspace.



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Well designed development can group homes at densities much greater than the metro Atlanta average yet still have room for big houses and plenty of greenspace.



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Even very dense residential buildings can feel open and green if designed well.

Benchmarking urban design that works well

Vibrant urban neighborhoods share common characteristics:

1. **Population densities sufficient to create lively street life**, support stores needed to meet daily needs, and enable first-class public transportation.
2. **A strong network of interconnected streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes.** Drivers have a choice of routes. Residents can choose to walk or bike for errands and to get to and from transit stops.
3. **Mixed-use development with lots of nearby amenities.** Mixed-use development should closely mix residences, offices and other businesses, stores, inviting streetscapes, parks and other public spaces, making it all easily accessible for pedestrians and easy to serve with public transportation.
4. **Public spaces.** Well designed compact development provides inviting squares, plazas, and sidewalks where residents can enjoy the company of others.
5. **Greenspace.** People who choose to live in denser neighborhoods swap big yards for vibrant streets and greater convenience. But they needn't swap greenspace. By clustering homes, businesses, and stores near one another, compact development frees up land for parks.
6. **Superior design.** Lively, fun street life is one of the rewards for living in urban areas. Communities must be welcoming, attractive, harmonious in appearance, and easy to navigate on foot. Residential blocks should be short, making them easy to walk, and close to conveniences and daily necessities. Streetscapes must make walking pleasant and safe. Buildings, including homes, must complement each other and enhance streets and other public spaces.

Well designed compact development can provide a stronger business environment, a healthier environment, a higher quality of life for all of us, and room for everyone.



To schedule a Coalition educational talk or to hear about other consulting services, contact:

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