3. WHAT ABOUT DETROIT? WHAT ABOUT LOS ANGELES?

It has not been uncommon the last couple of years to see people quoted in the news media as questioning whether one or the other of the two major factors in sprawl is really that important. The cause for doubt generally comes from the observation that a particular city that has no Population Growth – or that has no Per Capita Sprawl – still has major Overall Sprawl.

One example of these comments boils down to something like this: "What about Detroit? Clearly, Population Growth is not the key factor in sprawl when you consider that Detroit had no Population Growth whatsoever between 1970 and 1990, but it still was swimming in sprawl – 28.4%."

Another example would be: "What about Los Angeles? What's the use of pursuing all those Smart Growth objectives to reduce the amount of land consumption per resident when you look at the sprawling mess Los Angeles created? L.A. had no Per Capita Sprawl between 1970 and 1990; all growth in per capita consumption was stopped. Yet, L.A. was sprawling all over the place – 25.1%."

Anybody who was in Detroit or Los Angeles during that period knows that a 28% or 25% sprawl rate is large and is noticeable in one's daily quality of life. So what are we to learn from Urbanized Areas like these?

3.1. What about Detroit?
Cities where population growth stopped, but sprawl continued

Indeed, what about Pittsburgh, which not only stopped population growth but reduced its population by 9.1%? It still had 30.5% Overall Sprawl.

Something similar happened in Milwaukee, Dayton, New York City, Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, Youngstown-Warren, Akron, Flint, and Buffalo-Niagara Falls. All of them halted population growth but also had sprawl – lots of sprawl, in several cases. The average sprawl for the 11 Urbanized Areas with no population growth was 26%.

What do these cities teach us? First, that stabilizing population alone obviously will not stop sprawl. Second, we learn the power of per capita land consumption growth; all of these cities had a lot of it. While these cities prove that population growth is not the only factor in sprawl, they raise the question of whether population growth is a significant factor at all. One way to test is to compare Urbanized Areas of no population growth with those where population did grow.

Figure 2 — Average SPRAWL of cities grouped by percentage population growth

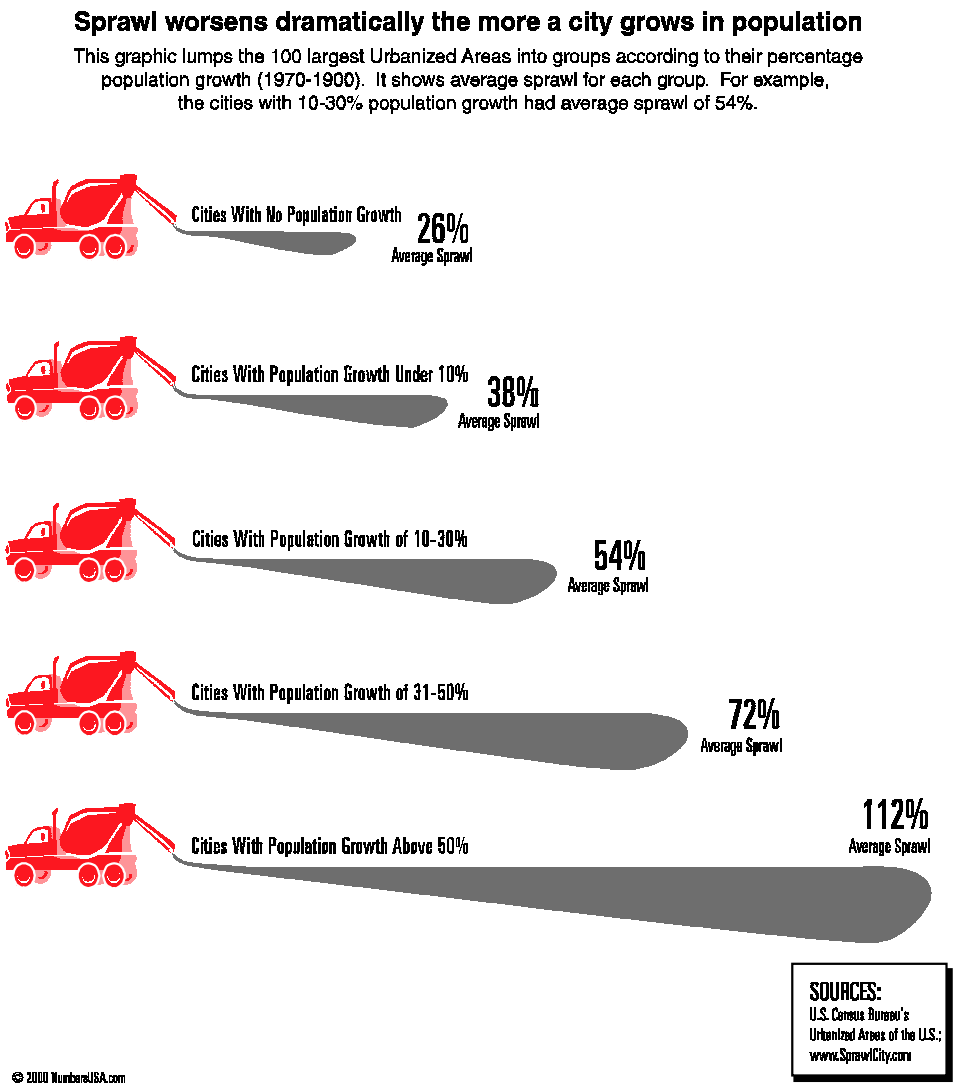


Figure 2 (on the left) groups the 100 Urbanized Areas by their percentage population growth. The results dramatically illustrate how the Areas sprawled by much higher amounts as their population growth rates increased. At the top is an illustration of the 26% average Overall Sprawl for the Areas that had no population growth. But the next strand of concrete poured from the cement truck shows that Areas with moderate population growth below 10% had significantly more sprawl – 38%. And each successive group of Areas with higher population growth had progressively worse sprawl up to the 112% average for Areas with more than 50% population growth.

These statistical comparisons provide fairly strong evidence that, on average, the higher a city's population growth, the higher the rate of sprawl.

As bad as residents of Detroit may have found the sprawl there during a time of no population growth, they might feel some consolation in the fact that their sprawl of 28.4% was far less than the average sprawl of 75% for the 89 Urbanized Areas where the population did grow.

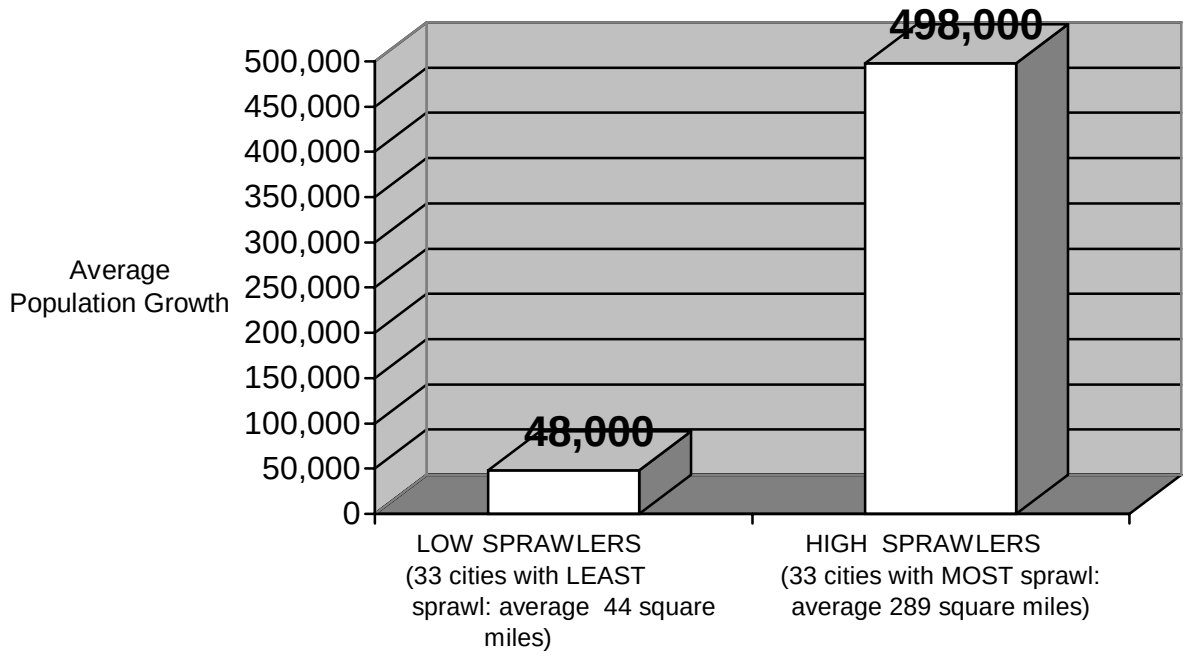
Thus, rather than proving that population-stabilization is an insignificant goal in anti-sprawl efforts, Detroit seems to suggest just the opposite. When considered in the context of all Urbanized Areas, the answer to the question, "What about Detroit?" might be: If its population growth had not stopped, its sprawl likely would have been far greater.

That may be an important message to hear in such cities, lest their governments inadvertently spur increased sprawl by adopting policies that entice population growth.

Figure 4 provides another way of testing the effect of a city adding population; it uses actual numbers rather than percentages. It looks at the one-third of Urbanized Areas that had the worst sprawl – an average of 289 square miles each. Those Areas averaged population growth of nearly a half-million.

Conversely, when we look at the one-third of Areas with the least sprawl – an average of 44 square miles each – we find they were having to handle an average of only 48,000 additional residents. The correlation between high sprawl and high population growth was strong, as was the correlation between low sprawl and low population growth.

Figure 4 - Average Population Growth Among Top Third and Bottom Third Sprawlers
(Source data: Census Bureau
100 largest Urbanized Areas 1970-90)



DESCRIPTION: The size of population growth was a strong predictor of the amount of sprawl. The 33 cities with the most square miles of sprawl had more than 10 times as much average population growth as the 33 with the least square miles of sprawl.

3.2. What about Los Angeles?
Cities where Per Capita Sprawl stopped, but sprawl continued

In a couple of key aspects, Los Angeles ought to be a poster city for anti-sprawl efforts. Unlike most U.S. Urbanized Areas, Los Angeles stopped all Per Capita Sprawl during the period of study. That is, the land consumption did not increase from the 0.12 acre per resident of 1970. That already was one of the densest living conditions in America.

Most Urbanized Areas that had less than a sixth of an acre per resident in 1970 had significant growth in per capita land consumption by 1990. But Los Angeles reduced its per capita land area by another 8%. Land consumption was falling not only in the urban core but also in the suburbs. By 1990, Los Angeles had achieved the Smart Growth honor of becoming the most densely populated Urbanized Area in America. No other city provided so little land per resident.

Yet, few people in America would think of Los Angeles as a model of Smart Growth. The reason is that Los Angeles continued to sprawl across an extra 394 square miles of orchards, farmland, natural habitat and other open and rural spaces.

Los Angeles was the sixth worst sprawler in the country in actual square miles.

There were other such disappointments, mainly in California and Florida. In all, 18 Urbanized Areas met the goal of stopping growth in per capita land consumption. In fact, all but one (Bakersfield) significantly reduced per capita land consumption. But all had Overall Sprawl. On average, the percentage sprawl of the 18 was 53.4%, twice as bad as that of Los Angeles, and twice as bad as the average for the Urbanized Areas like Detroit that had no Population Growth.

Los Angeles and the other 17 Areas prove that stopping Per Capita Sprawl won't come close to stopping Overall Sprawl if the population is allowed to grow significantly. All 18 had major Population Growth (see **Table 4**).

Table 4 –Urbanized Areas that Stopped Per Capita Sprawl
These areas reduced per capita land consumption
but had much Overall Sprawl (1970-1990)

% Growth in Per Capita Land Consumption	**Urbanized Area** (alphabetical order)	**% Growth in Total Land Area**	**Population Growth**
-5.9%	Corpus Christi, TX	19.3%	26.9%
-15.1%	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX	34.8%	58.7%
-23.6%	Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano, FL	54.1%	101.7%
-2.7%	Fresno, CA	67.8%	72.5%
-15.7%	Honolulu, HI	20.6%	43.0%
-35.3%	Las Vegas, NV	90.7%	194.6%
-8.4%	Los Angeles, CA	25.1%	36.5%
-13.2%	Miami-Hialeah, FL	36.3%	57.0%
-28.3%	Oxnard-Ventura, CA	40.9%	96.4%
-17.7%	Phoenix, AZ	91.3%	132.4%
-25.9%	Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	48.6%	100.5%
-21.0%	Sacramento, CA	36.7%	73.1%
-16.3%	Salt Lake City, UT	37.9%	64.7%
-7.5%	San Diego, CA	81.3%	96.0%
-12.8%	San Jose, CA	22.1%	40.0%
-3.5%	Stockton, CA	57.7%	63.4%
-18.7%	West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL	124.8%	176.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data

Does that mean that anti-sprawl campaigns should de-emphasize the Smart Growth goals of reducing per capita land consumption? Logic once again shows us the error of that suggestion. As bad as their average Overall Sprawl rate was (53.4%), it still was a third lower than the Urbanized Areas that failed to stop either Per Capita Sprawl or Population Growth. If the Population Growth for the 18 had occurred without stopping Per Capita Sprawl, the loss of rural land would have been far worse.

Even though Population Growth is the untamed problem in Los Angeles and the other 17 Areas, it would be a mistake for anti-sprawl campaigns and literature to emphasize only Population Growth and exclude the potential problems of Per Capita Sprawl. Without using Smart Growth

tools, per capita land use easily could begin to grow again and multiply the Overall Sprawl in those Urbanized Areas.