

research in brief

Impact of Suburbanization on Rural Towns

Editor's Note

Many Extension educators are asked to explain why land use planning, planned communities, and planned growth make sense. This is a tough assignment. The following article gives one set of data relevant to the problem.

In this study, Wyckoff says, "The implications of all this to those rural towns finding themselves in the path of development are clear. The residents of these towns could expect higher assessments, higher tax rates, and higher tax levies, as compared to the present city dweller."

This study reports on the changing situation in the Springfield-Chicopee-Holyoke Standard Metropolitan Service Area (SMSA) in Massachusetts. In the SMSA, from 1952 to 1965, the amount of land in urban use increased 57%. The increase in land in urban use was only 38% in the 5 central cities, while it was 87% in the 15 surrounding towns.

Two-thirds of the farms in the SMSA went out of business, while the amount of land in farms declined 45%. The impact on agriculture in the surrounding towns was even greater—71% of the farms had disappeared. The population had increased 18% in the SMSA—7% in cities (less than the natural rate) and 50% in the towns (out-migration, city to town).

Three-fourths of the new urban land in one city under study had been used for residential purposes—most of it in single family dwellings. Single family dwellings used 75% of the residential land in the cities and 95% in the towns. These dwelling units had an average density of 2 to 4 people an acre, while multiple unit dwellings had a density of 20-33 people an acre. Land moving into industrial and commercial uses exhibited the same trends—7 people an acre in new lands, 7 17 in the established cities.

New houses didn't bear the total public cost that they placed on the town. More services also were needed. Per capita assessed evaluation increased 1.5% in the cities and 8.4% in the towns. The tax rate increased 22% faster in the towns and the tax rate increased 3.4% per year for towns compared with 2.8% for cities. Finally, the net debt for towns was increasing at an

annual rate of 48.8% per capita compared to 12.8% for cities. The per capita debt of the suburbanite exceeded that of the city dweller by 30%.

The author's exploration of the means available to control change, the policy implications for use of zoning and subdivision controls, and his suggested alternatives make interesting reading.

"Impact of Suburbanization on Rural Towns: A Case Study."
J. B. Wyckoff. *Journal of Community Development Society*,
IV (Spring, 1973), 48-57.

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