

## SECTION 4: POST-SURVEY FOCUS GROUPS

Participants in the survey were invited to participate in the focus group with the purpose of further investigating issues of the survey and providing qualitative data to complement the quantitative data generated by the survey. Post-survey focus groups were on August 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 15, 2008. Focus groups were facilitated by Gary Segers, member of the COMPASS Public Participation Committee. The following reflects points made by groups participating in the focus groups:

### Large Lots

Larger lots provide many advantages to owners and personify the western life. Many of the advantages of Idahoan life are found in these types of development: large yards provide privacy, open space for recreation, and are a status symbol of the American Dream.

However many of these benefits are becoming marginalized by changing demographics, increased growth, and stress on the transportation system. Larger lots tend to increase urban sprawl, the outward expansion of development in areas without adequate infrastructure. Larger lots often don't cover the public costs of this type of development. Transportation networks are often underdeveloped in rural areas due to their lower daily traffic demands. However, as new development occurs, these substandard roadways become main thoroughfares. Often funding and improvements of these roadways lag behind as impact fees can't cover the necessary costs.

Other trends make these larger lots less desirable than before. While previous generations have preferred large lots to provide sufficient open space for children, current generations are not housing as many children and see public amenities as equally, or more, important as private space. Typically, younger generations do not value acreage, they value convenience. These conveniences rarely can be satisfied in less dense, rural or exurban fringe development.

Other economic conditions, particularly rising energy prices, make larger lots less attainable for many household budgets. Rising gas prices make rural housing locations less desirable as more discretionary income is needed for automobile costs and less is available for housing. Households are making conscious decisions between paying for housing costs or transportation costs. Energy costs could also make larger houses (typically found on larger lots) more unaffordable. National data shows that house sizes are shrinking, opposed to trends over the previous decades. The size of the average single-family house has increased almost 50% over the past three decades. However, by 2007, the trend of increasing home sizes had reversed and by 2008 home sizes were declining.<sup>42</sup> Similar data compiled by COMPASS indicates that housing sizes may also be shrinking compared to previous years (page 24).

### High Density

The integration of higher density development in an existing neighborhood can cause concern for neighborhoods, developers, and municipalities. However, as expressed by the focus groups, higher density can be a positive as it helps to diversify a neighborhood's composition. Several issues of what makes high density integrate into a neighborhood should be considered.

- Higher density projects have even greater need for good architecture. Architectural elements such as varying rooflines, use of quality materials such as brick or rock, and lush and well maintained

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<sup>42</sup> Baker, K., As Housing Market Weakens, Homes Are Getting Smaller, AIArchitect, 2008

landscaping is critical. Higher density developments that had good quality ranked high than lower-density, lower-design housing options. However, higher density projects that appeared to have cookie-cutter design or other poor design were the lowest ranked in the survey and by the focus groups.

- Higher density is appropriate in areas where infrastructure (particularly public transit) already serves the area. Transit-oriented density is viewed as a positive as it reduces the demand on the roadway system and alleviates congestion. However, an appropriate transition between low-density and higher density development is necessary. Density is an acceptable development pattern when it is master planned, however, participants were frustrated with gentrification of existing neighborhoods to support additional housing, especially if the new development do not visually transition well with existing development. In particular, neighborhoods which had homes removed to infill with skinny houses were a frustration to residents.
- Focus group participants indicated that common areas and private outdoor space is important. Public space helps to provide amenities and separate buildings to reduce the appearance of crowding. Detached homes in dense neighborhoods typically appeared denser than attached homes when there was public space nearby the attached units. It was noted that all housing units need private spaces are needed for recreation space, even if that space is small.
- Demographic changes are making density appealing. Single women are becoming a major group in the home-buying industry and account for almost 1/4 of all houses purchased nationally.<sup>43</sup> Typically, they want ownership but without a lot of the maintenance issues of large outdoor areas. Also, in-migration of residents from other urbanized areas where they are used to density makes for more palatable developments.

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<sup>43</sup> National Association of Realtor's 2007 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers

### Multi-Family Units as a Percentage of Total Units 2000 to 2007<sup>44</sup>

Year	Ada County			Canyon County			Regional Total		
	Total Residential Units	Multi-Family Units	% Total	Total Residential Units	Multi-Family Units	% Total	Total Residential Units	Multi-Family Units	% Total
2000	3,889	399	10%	2,232	126	6%	6,121	525	9%
2001	4,503	1,180	26%	2,520	133	5%	7,023	1,313	19%
2002	3,953	635	16%	2,902	218	8%	6,855	853	12%
2003	4,764	784	16%	2,493	254	10%	7,257	1,038	14%
2004	5,475	591	11%	2,615	422	16%	8,090	1,013	13%
2005	7,826	607	8%	3,212	105	3%	11,038	712	6%
2006	4,682	767	16%	3,283	216	7%	7,965	983	12%
2007	3,204	964	30%	1,686	441	26%	4,890	1,406	29%

### Multiplex

Participants in the focus groups were also asked to provide input on multi-family dwellings which are designed to appear as large, single-family buildings, or multiplexes. Multiplexes are popular in some areas as a more palatable option of provide density while still integrating into single-family neighborhoods. Focus group participants generally considered multiplexes to be a positive development in a neighborhood as they provide additional housing opportunities without reducing property values.



Hiding densities can be a good thing, however, other effects are also considered. When multiplexes are built, residents still need enough parking, open space, and public infrastructure to ensure that the development does not burden the neighborhood. Also, landscaping and maintenance of the site help maintain the quality appearance of a single-family building instead of a multi-family development. It is also important that such multiplexes provide ample back-yard space that many consumers, especially those with children, desire for privacy and safety for children.



<sup>44</sup> 2007 Development Monitoring Report

### Trade-offs between Urban and Suburban Form

A major component of this study was to determine the balance of preferences of urban and suburban building types. Though discussed in detail in the focus groups, there was no agreed upon answer or consensus. While it was typically considered that suburban growth is benefits families and needs for space; density is typically a better form for convenience near employment and services. Both in the focus groups and in the survey results, a significant portion of proponents for each development type exists. Urban densities are becoming more popular; however, the market for single-family structures is very strong as well.

### Demographic Changes

Several participants explained their housing preferences as both what they like now and what would change in the future. For many they considered a single-family house in a traditional suburban development to be the current ideal, but as their conditions change another housing option may be more appropriate. Issues such as health, desire for convenience, retirement, and inability to drive caused participants to indicate a more urban lifestyle is desired in upcoming years.

It appears that there are two groups who may affect the demand for housing more than others: those that are nearing retirement and looking to downsize, and those, such as small families, that are buying first homes.

Some participants who were nearing retirement or whose children are leaving home expressed higher interest in reducing the cost and maintenance of a large house and yard. This group indicated a preference towards smaller urban lot sizes, nearby conveniences, and one-story buildings. Both townhouse developments near transit and downtowns were appealing options for this group as well. Others in this age and lifestyle category expressed an interest to live in the same place but have their homes retrofitted to accommodate aging households. This group expressed had invested in their neighborhoods, social networks, and comfort of their homes and desired to “age in place.”

For younger households, there appears to be more of a desire for urban-style housing choices than previous generations. Some demographers have speculated that media has influenced the way we perceive urban and suburban lifestyles. Previous generations had their housing choices defined by "Leave It to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." The generation entering the home buying phase was brought up with a wider range of urban experiences from watching "Seinfeld" and "Friends" which has made urban lifestyles look more appealing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ehrenhalt, A., Trading Places, New Republic, 2008.

## SECTION 5: HOUSING INVENTORY<sup>46</sup>

This section provides an account of the current housing stock within Ada and Canyon Counties. The 2000 housing inventory provides a baseline of the conditions (type of structure and year) as of the last census year (2000). The 2008 Housing Inventory section provides a comparison view of the type of housing constructed in the last eight years.

### 2000 Housing Inventory

#### 2000 Housing Units by Units in Structure

Type	Count	Percentage of Total
Single-family Detached	118,022	70.9%
Single-family Attached	6,417	3.9%
Duplex	4,957	3.0%
Multi-family (3 - 19 Units)	15,977	9.5%
Multi-family (20 - 49 Units)	3,318	2.0%
Multi-family (50+ Units)	3,750	2.2%
Mobile Home	13,627	8.2%
Boat, RV, Van, Etc.	413	0.2%
Total	166,481	

#### 2000 Housing Units by Year Structure Built

Year Built	Count	Percentage of Total
1939 or Earlier	12,339	7.4%
1940 to 1949	8,682	5.2%
1950 to 1959	13,535	8.1%
1960 to 1969	13,799	8.3%
1970 to 1979	40,700	24.4%
1980 to 1989	21,221	12.7%
1990 to 1994	21,503	12.9%
1995 to 1998	26,321	15.8%
1999 to March 2000	8,381	5.0%
Total	166,481	

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<sup>46</sup> Claritas Data, 2008

## 2008 Housing Inventory

### 2008 Housing Units by Units in Structure

Type	Count	Percentage of Total	Change in Percentage 2000 to 2008
Single-family Detached	160,608	73.2%	2.3%
Single-family Attached	7,530	3.4%	-0.5%
Duplex	5,487	2.5%	-0.5%
Multi-family (3 - 19 Units)	18,759	8.5%	-1.0%
Multi-family (20 - 49 Units)	3,882	1.8%	-0.2%
Multi-family (50+ Units)	4,268	1.9%	-0.3%
Mobile Home	18,420	8.4%	0.2%
Boat, RV, Van, Etc.	600	0.3%	0.1%
Total	219,554		

### 2008 Housing Units by Year Structure Built

Year Built	Count	Percentage of Total
1939 or Earlier	12,339	5.6%
1940 to 1949	8,682	4.0%
1950 to 1959	13,535	6.2%
1960 to 1969	13,799	6.3%
1970 to 1979	40,700	18.5%
1980 to 1989	21,221	9.7%
1990 to 1994	21,503	9.8%
1995 to 1998	26,321	12.0%
1999 to March 2000	8,381	3.8%
April 2000 to December 2007	66,645	30.4%
Total	219,554	

From 2000 to 2008 over 30% of the current housing stock was constructed. This is an indication of the impact on the landscape that a few years of home construction can have; the next several years provides an opportunity to have a lasting impact on the transportation patterns, environmental aspects, and quality of life of the region.

During this time the only types of residential construction to rise in proportion of total was detached single family housing, mobile homes, and miscellaneous (boat, RV, Van, etc.). While many results of the survey would indicate that there is preference for a variety of housing types, including townhouses, and condominiums, that type of construction has not kept pace with the rest of development.