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Study: Growing numbers of Valley residents want walkable neighborhoods

BAKERSFIELD

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- **Prefer their homes to be near their jobs**
- **“We need to end sprawling development patterns”**

If a student released Wednesday by a nonprofit that promotes in-fill development pans out, living in the eight counties of the San Joaquin could look surprisingly different by mid-century.

The Council of Infill Builders is forecasting housing demand through 2050 that shows that the San Joaquin Valley will need significantly more walkable homes in cities and towns to meet future demand.

The new data come as the California Air Resources Board sets to meet in Bakersfield on Thursday, to address how the eight counties from Kern in the south to San Joaquin in the north, are coordinating their land use and transportation policies and adapting to serve the region’s changing population and market forces.

The report, “A Home for Everyone: San Joaquin Valley Housing Preferences and Opportunities to 2050,” finds that continuing business-as-usual Valley land use policies will leave empty nesters and first-time renters and buyers underserved.

The report found market demand driving the following trends:

- Significant projected increases in demand for apartments, condos and townhomes

Up to 45 percent of all new residential construction in the Valley between 2010 and 2050 will need to be “attached” homes, meaning apartments, condos and townhomes, to meet future demand (a finding first made by The Concord Group in a report for the Fresno Council of Governments.)

- Existing supply of large-lot homes appears sufficient to meet 2050 demand

Valley communities may already have about as many existing homes on larger lots (those over 6,000 square feet) in 2010 as they need by 2050. While these homes may have met previous demand, emerging markets appear to prefer different housing options.

- Demand for walkable, smaller-lot single family homes is strong and growing

Potentially all new single-family homes built to 2050 would need to be on small lots to meet projected market demand, the report opines. For example, consumer preference surveys in Kern County indicate that up to 48 percent of the total supply of single-family homes would need to be on small lots (6,000 square feet or less) by 2050, while only five percent of the current supply in the Valley is on small lots, it says.

Cities can accommodate the majority of this new growth on already-developed land, the report says. With only minor changes to zoning and development regulations, Valley cities and counties can redevelop low-density urban and suburban centers and commercial corridors and convert existing nonresidential buildings and vacant land, it says. The result will be more efficient use of land and less farmland lost to development, it claims.

“We need to end sprawling development patterns in order to ease the financial burden on local governments and capture the next wave of housing demand,” says Council of Infill Builders board member David Mogavero, a Sacramento real estate developer and architect. “As this report reveals, walkable urban development will sustain its value for decades to come.”

The Council of Infill Builders describes itself as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation “of real estate professionals committed to improving California through infill development.”

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