

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## **Growing Smarter: Residents Provide Recipe for Smart Growth**

Tribune Editorial (20 March 08)

The red-hot housing market along the Wasatch Front has been iced by the credit crisis and prices that rose too high too fast.

In 2007, sales of existing homes fell 24 percent in Salt Lake County, 25 percent in Utah County, 18 percent in Davis and 14 percent in Weber compared to 2006.

And last month, a scant 261 building permits for new homes were secured along the Wasatch Front, down from 928 in February 2007. It was the lowest issue since at least 1990, the year records were first kept.

But there's a bright side to what is sure to be a temporary respite from our rapid growth, characterized by sprawling subdivisions and cookie-cutter developments. Developers and municipal officials will have a chance to catch their breath, and re-evaluate the way they're shaping our communities, and our future.

Air pollution. Traffic congestion. New neighborhoods that eat up the last of our open spaces with monster homes and monster lawns, and spawn mind-numbing architectural, economic and demographic conformity.

A comprehensive survey conducted by HarrisInteractive on behalf of the smart-growth gurus at Envision Utah - "Utah Values and Future Growth" - shows that Utahns are tiring of it, and fast.

The firm convened focus groups and polled 1,262 Utahns, including 934 from along the Wasatch Front, and compared the results to a similar study in 1997. It showed a growing disenchantment with runaway growth - only 36 percent believe "future growth will make things better," down from 55 percent a decade ago.

And it painted a picture of what Wasatch Front residents envision as the "ideal community," a model that, if embraced by developers and planning officials, can help curb sprawl and address related problems.

The people want a mix of lot sizes and housing types, primarily moderate-sized single-family homes and town houses. (Salt Lake County participants want some apartment buildings sprinkled in.) They want easy access to public transportation - buses, rail and TRAX - and open spaces: parks, gardens, playgrounds, recreation fields, nature preserves and trails. And they want neighbors who represent a mix of ages and family stages.

Nearly three-fourths of the survey participants favored communities with the above attributes, which constitute a recipe for vibrant, diverse, livable, sustainable neighborhoods. Developers and municipal leaders should give the people what they want.