

## Utah lifestyle

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If you think big family homes with grassy yards in the suburbs is quintessential Utah, think again.

While for decades, large families, predominantly of the LDS faith, have moved west to what used to be vast open areas of Salt Lake County, the LDS Church itself is now leading a shift toward quite a different lifestyle. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is spending about a billion dollars to create a new downtown with a huge, upscale mall, City Creek Center, just south of Temple Square.

But the development is much more than a mall. High-rise condos and apartments are a big part of it, along with a grocery store just east of the mall. And not coincidentally the downtown is served by an intermodal transit hub, with TRAX lines, heavy rail and buses to ferry people around.

It's just the type of community development, involving public transit, clustered housing, retail and commercial, that is touted by urban planners as the anti-sprawl wave of the future. And it's a shift in thinking that Utah desperately needs to counter our reliance on cars and long-distance commuting that is a big cause of Utah's unhealthy air.

A group of elected officials, planners, business leaders and ethnic advocacy groups met last week to talk about implementing a plan just like City Creek Center, on a smaller scale, in town centers along the Wasatch Front. It's called Wasatch Choice for 2040.

The group consensus is that suburban housing that eats up open space and encourages people to jam Utah highways in ever-increasing numbers is not sustainable. Andrew Gruber, executive director of the Wasatch Front Regional Council, cited startling statistics: The Wasatch Front will add another 1.4 million people within 30 years, an increase of 65 percent. If development continued to focus on traditional single-family homes in suburbs, traffic would increase from 49 million miles a day now to more than 90 million miles by 2040.

The problem is that it's impossible to turn back the clock on the urban sprawl that decades of poor planning have already created. Still, there remain some opportunities to reduce future increases in traffic congestion and pollution by creating centers where residents can work and play close to home, and commute by walking or biking. Surveys show 75 percent of Utahns want to live in such communities.

The shift will have to be driven on the most local levels. Cities and counties will have to change zoning laws. Developers will have to make changes in the way they do business. Utahns will have to create the demand. But the promise of cleaner air and more healthful living is worth the effort.