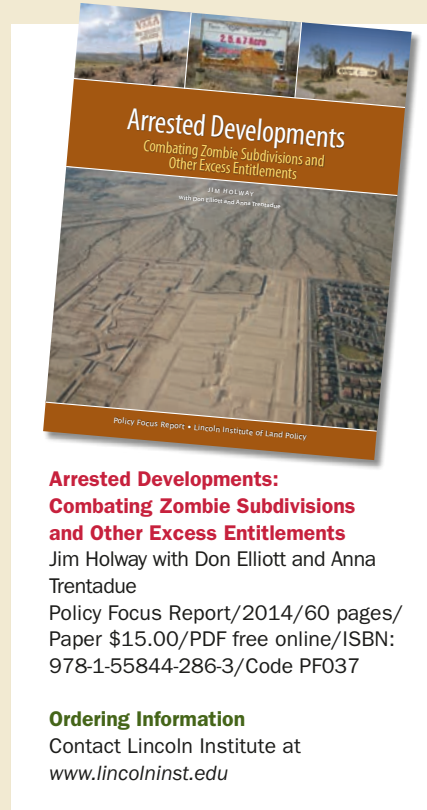


Arrested Developments: Combating Zombie Subdivisions and Other Excess Entitlements

In the U.S. Intermountain West, the real estate boom and bust of the 2000s left many residential development projects incomplete. Across many of the region's counties, the rate of vacant subdivision parcels ranges from around 15 percent to two-thirds of all lots. From paper plats to partially built subdivisions that require road maintenance and other infrastructure without contributing to the local tax base as planned, excess development entitlements—the rights, granted by local government, to develop land—are compromising the quality of life, distorting growth patterns and real estate markets, and diminishing fiscal health in their communities.

This policy focus report, produced in conjunction with the Sonoran Institute, provides information and tools to help cities and counties struggling with problems that stem from arrested developments in their communities, from health and safety hazards to blight, impacts on existing lot owners, fiscal threats, fragmented development patterns, overcommitted natural resources, and market flooding and distortions. Although the research focuses on the eight U.S. Intermountain West states—Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming—the policy recommendations and best practices are applicable nationwide.

The authors begin by exploring the economic context that fostered the entitlement of so much land in advance of market demand for new housing, as well as the framework of state and local laws within which local governments manage and regulate land development. They then draw on case studies, lessons shared by experts during several workshops, survey results, and data analysis to identify the challenges municipalities typically face when they attempt to address excess development entitlements. Finally, they recommend treatment and prevention measures—including a model process to help communities start



addressing problems in their jurisdictions.

The authors suggest that local governments should build a solid foundation of policies, laws, and programs, in order to facilitate recovery, create more sustainable growth scenarios, improve property values, and pursue land and habitat conservation where those land uses are more appropriate. They should also ensure they have mechanisms in place to adapt and adjust to evolving market conditions. Communities likely to face significant growth pressures would be well served by development management policies that help to align new entitlements and infrastructure investments with evolving market demands. Cities and towns already coping with distressed subdivisions should summon a willingness to reconsider past approvals and projects and to acknowledge problems.

The report concludes with nine policy recommendations.

- Adopt new state enabling authority to ensure local governments have the tools and guidance they need.
- Prepare and revise community comprehensive plans and entitlement strategies as a foundation for local action.
- Adopt enhanced procedures for development approvals and ensure policies are up to date and consistently applied.
- Adapt and adjust policy approaches to market conditions.
- Rationalize development assurances to ensure they are practical, affordable, and enforceable.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure development pays its share of costs.
- Serve as a facilitator and pursue public-private partnerships to forge creative and sustainable solutions.
- Establish systems for monitoring, tracking, and analyzing development data to enable effective and targeted solutions to specific subdivisions.
- Build community capacity and maintain the necessary political will to take and sustain policy action.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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