

# NORTHWEST ENVIRONMENT WATCH

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## **Sprawl and Smart Growth in Greater Vancouver: Executive Summary**

Northwest Environment Watch's new report—"Sprawl and Smart Growth in Greater Vancouver"—assesses greater Vancouver's success at curbing sprawl and developing efficiently over a 15-year period, from 1986 to 2001. Using census data and digital mapping, NEW researchers ranked municipalities' and districts' records in smart growth, and compared greater Vancouver with another fast-growing metropolis in the Pacific Northwest—the Seattle-Tacoma region. NEW is coreleasing the report with SmartGrowth BC, on September 12, 2002, in Vancouver. **On September 11, NEW researchers will present findings from the report to the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Planning and Environment Committee; the meeting starts at 8:30am. See below for details.**

See [www.northwestwatch.org/press/vancouvergrowth.html](http://www.northwestwatch.org/press/vancouvergrowth.html) for all materials and animated maps.

Top findings include:

- Greater Vancouver's population increased by nearly 50 percent between 1986 and 2001, a higher annual growth rate—2.6 percent—than many developing-world megacities. This rapid growth has brought two key challenges: maintaining transportation options for an increasingly crowded region and protecting green space and farmland from runaway development.
- Greater Vancouver has met both challenges by channeling growth inward into compact neighborhoods, which consume less land and maintain more transportation options than does sprawl. Greater Seattle, in contrast, has grown outward, at the expense of both farmland and transportation choices.
- Fully 62 percent of greater Vancouver's residents now live in compact neighborhoods (defined as having 12 residents or more per acre), such as Kitsilano and Commercial Drive, up from 46 percent in 1986. In contrast, only 25 percent of Seattle-area residents live in compact neighborhoods.
- Eleven percent of greater Vancouver's residents live in highly compact, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods (40 residents or more per acre), the gold standard for compact growth because they bring the steepest reductions in driving and the greatest land savings.
- Not all Vancouver-area jurisdictions have been equally successful at containing sprawl. New Westminster and the cities of Vancouver and North Vancouver have the best record, with between 78 and 90 percent of their residents living in compact neighborhoods in 2001. West Vancouver, Port Moody, and Langley District have lagged, with only about 25 percent of their residents living in compact communities. The metropolitan area's continued success depends on intensifying development of a few, dense residential areas.

- ◆ One reason for Vancouver's success is BC's province-wide farmland protection policies, which established the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in the 1970s. The ALR has protected farmland within greater Vancouver and, almost inadvertently, helped promote compact communities. In contrast, metropolitan Seattle's system for establishing land-use policies has long been more localized and, as a result, more susceptible to development pressures. Recently the BC provincial government has made changes to the Agricultural Land Commission Act that provide more local control over farmland protection.
- Had greater Vancouver sprawled like Seattle during the 1990s, it would have taken over an additional 18,000 acres of undeveloped land—an area about four-fifths the size of Burnaby.
- Compared with greater Vancouver, greater Seattle spreads across three-quarters more land per resident. If greater Vancouver had the same overall population density as Seattle, about 650 square kilometers of additional land would be covered with suburban development—an area equivalent to all the remaining developable land in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), plus four-fifths of the remaining agricultural land.

**Note: On September 11, Northwest Environment Watch (NEW) will present its findings to the Greater Vancouver Regional District's Environment and Planning Committee, 4330 Kingsway, 17th floor Board Room, Burnaby. The meeting begins at 8:30am; NEW will present around 9am.**

*Northwest Environment Watch (NEW) is a Seattle-based nonprofit research and communication center that tracks the region's progress toward a sustainable economy and way of life. NEW's sprawl reports and its most recent book, "This Place on Earth 2002: Measuring What Matters," are the first products of the group's multi-year project to develop an index of true progress for the Northwest—an alternative to economic indicators such as the Dow Jones and the gross domestic product. For more information, see [www.northwestwatch.org](http://www.northwestwatch.org)*

*Smart Growth BC is a province-wide non-governmental organization with a mission to create more livable communities. Working with community groups, businesses and local governments, the organization promotes compact and complete communities, sustainable transportation, affordable housing, protection of agricultural land and greenspace, efficient use of infrastructure, and more effective citizen engagement. For more information see [www.smartgrowth.bc.ca](http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca)*

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