The Sprawling City: Effects and Solutions

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Definition of Urban Sprawl:
Low-density expansion of urban centers generally into low density areas. Often accompanied by a lack of land development within the urban centers themselves.

Negative Effects of Sprawl –
• Waste of taxpayer's money
• Higher fuel costs
• Loss of farmland
• Damages the environment
• Negative health effects
• Central City Shrinkage and Decline
  • Deteriorating public services
  • Drives out businesses
  • High unemployment
  • Rising poverty & crime

Actions taken to reduce sprawl-
• State Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act
• Efforts by IDAs
• Regional Framework
• Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan
• Buffalo's Green Code
• The work of nonprofits:
  • PUSH Buffalo's Green Development Zone
  • Massachusetts Avenue Projects

Major Causes of Sprawl in Buffalo–
• Loss of industry
• White flight and sunbelt flight
• American Dream
• Advancements in technology
• Government policies
• Lack of investment in public transportation
• Venture development by local industrial development agencies(IDAs)
• Poor planning

Positive Effects of Sprawl–
• Polycentric models demonstrate that sprawl can result in:
  • Lower transportation costs
  • Decreased average commute times
• Land is cheaper in the suburbs
• People like living in the suburbs
• Problems with dense cities
• The share of land consumed by development is relatively small
• Sprawl is a product of the free market economy's "invisible hand"

Despite its benefits, I have found substantially more evidence of negative economic effects of sprawl on Buffalo.

Suggestions to further decrease sprawl–
• Creation of a regional planning organization
• Limiting the extension of water and sewer lines
• Investing in existing infrastructure
• Implementation of Smart Growth Policies
• Smart Growth Audits

References–