

# Facts and questions about Davis' densification

By John Lofland  
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People interested in Davis "densification" owe City Councilman Ted Puntillo a big thanks for clarifying this subject at the council's Dec. 9 meeting.

Commenting on a proposed R-2 Conservation District for the Old East and Old North areas, he emphatically declared about this measure: "This is densification — big time!" On this and other measures he additionally observed that "everything is getting as many people as we can on a piece of property."

Puntillo's assertions are important because (among other reasons) a city planner had several times previously in this hearing claimed that this ordinance was not a densification measure.

Therefore, Puntillo and the Planning Department are in conflict. Who is right? Will the proposed R-2 Conservation District ordinance produce densification or not? And further, should it?

This dispute raises the larger questions of: "What do we mean by densification?" and "Where in Davis, if anywhere, should it happen?" Let me begin possible answers to these questions under the rubrics of "density facts" and "densification questions."

## Density facts:

How many people live in a square mile in various locations?

1. Davis' density is about 5,500 people per square mile. Is 5,500 a big number or a little number? The answer is that it is a fairly big number.

2. Consider these populations per square mile counts of nearby cities and communities: Woodland, 4,300; Sacramento, 3,800; Dixon, 2,700; and Winters, 2,000.

3. Then consider these square mile populations of some major American cities: Chicago, 3,200; New York City, 7,400; city of Los Angeles, 7,400; and San Francisco, 15,800.

4. In a much wider and comparative perspective, contemplate: world, 118; United States, 77; United Kingdom, 635; and German, 597.

5. And then think about these places with very high populations per square mile: Hong Kong, 16,700; Singapore, 17,300; and Monaco, 45,000.

(Some of these density figures are rounded and may be slightly higher than given here. They are, however, order-of-magnitude accurate.)

## Densification questions:

1. I think we Davis residents might start to talk about our target level of population per square mile. Do we want to go from 5,500 to, say, 10,000? Should Monaco, at 45,000, be our model? Or, do we want to go lower?

No matter what we might prefer, without a reasonably specific and public understanding of where we are and where we want to go, we are merely moving bodies around in the dark.

2. In what parts of Davis (if any) should we encourage or discourage densification?

For example, the Old North already has a population per square mile of 7,000 in its nine main blocks. Do we want to push above this already elevated number?

As can be seen in the densities given, the Old North is already in the range of New York City and Los Angeles. Do we want it to be in the range of Singapore and Hong Kong?

3. Alternatively, should we try to raise the density of those areas that are significantly below the citywide average of 5,500?

For example, College Park has a density in the range of a mere 3,000. Should we impose zoning that brings it up to the 5,500 citywide level? Or, because it is so close to UC Davis, perhaps we should set a goal of 15,000 per square mile (or higher) for College Park.

In addition, many of the blocks in the downtown have a density of zero. Should new zonings coerce them to raise from zero to at least 5,500 people per square mile? To 15,000 per square mile?

4. Should areas now way above the 5,500 level be left alone until citywide parity is achieved? (Interestingly, Davis already has a fair number of very high density areas that some people refer to as student apartment ghettos.)

5. I hope that the concept of a population per square mile measure will help move us beyond mere slogans and toward quantitative public policy.

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**OP-ED**

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