

Sprawl Gets Personal

Project Ideas

History, policy, and sprawl...

1. Within the 30 years between 1950 and 1980, what caused people to flee from the city to the suburbs? Consider such matters as the economy, government programs, circumstances in the American family, and life in American cities.
2. Describe the history of American cities from 1850 to the present. Explain their rise and fall and the forces that brought about changes at different times.
3. The state of Ohio is not considered a leader in combating sprawl. Research and compare how two other regions are tackling the problem. (See websites.)
4. Research and write a report on what is happening in the state of Ohio concerning use of land. Consider local, county and state governing bodies and non-profit organizations.
5. Interview the Mayor of your city, a member of City Council or the City Manager. Ask the following questions: 1) In what ways is our city in competition with neighboring towns? 2) What are the contentious issues between our city and our neighbors, and how are we handling them? 3) How would you change the situation if you could? Write a report based on your interview.
6. Research the concept of revenue-sharing. Describe it; then explain how it could work locally. Can you find competing developments near you that might have been designed to better serve the public if a revenue-sharing plan were in place? Describe what you see.
7. Research the impact sprawling development has on race relations in Ohio. Consider such matters as housing, work, schools, where the state of Ohio invests tax dollars, and the social interaction (or lack of it) among different groups of people.
8. Describe the concept of comprehensive planning. Find out if your city has a comprehensive plan. What role might such plans play in combating sprawl? Are they working with other municipalities to reduce the costs of services like fire and police protection?
9. Research highway and public transit development in Ohio so you can write an essay defending or criticizing the statement, "Highways lead to sprawling development."
10. Write an essay describing what you believe is a good balance between private property rights and a person's public responsibilities--private rights versus the common good. Find examples through research to support what you conclude.
11. Find out if your city has areas zoned for mixed use. Are parks and undeveloped areas protected from development? Write a report about your findings.
12. Explain how government incentives (\$\$) work and how enlightened use of them by the state of Ohio can help fight sprawling development.

13. Keep a log for one month about your car. Use the following categories: routine expenses; miles traveled each day; destinations; repairs; costs for insurance, license, tickets; other. When finished, calculate the means and cost of living through the same activities without the use of a car.
14. You don't have a car? Do project #13, but keep a log on your use of public transportation.
15. Increasing amounts of carbon are entering the atmosphere, causing global warming. Explore how choices of home locations, types of homes, and materials used contribute to global warming.
16. Write a paper defending or debunking why regional governments might make more sense than independent town councils. Consider financial, environmental, and political factors.

The creative arts and sprawl...

17. Write and perform a rap on sprawl.
18. Write a short-story with one of the main elements being sprawl.
19. Design a portfolio of original art illustrating both sprawl and good urban design (photography, painting, etc.).
20. Produce a five minute original video or DVD depicting both sprawl and good urban design. Include a script.
21. Consider the importance of good architectural design in city living. What are the roles played by mixed-use development and public transportation in developing well designed urban communities?
22. Describe how "the golden section" (a mathematical formula) relates to building design. Frank Lloyd Wright's houses have these hidden regulating diagonals. Compare the aesthetics of "the golden section" to current architecture.