



# CREATING COMMUNITIES

## *A GUIDE TO WALKABLE CENTERS*

A RESOURCE FOR CREATING **LIVE, WORK, PLAY, AND LEARN** COMMUNITIES IN UTAH



**Envision  
Utah** How we grow matters.

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TEMPLE SQUARE, SALT LAKE CITY

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## ABOUT ENVISION UTAH

Envision Utah is a nonprofit, public-private partnership that was founded in 1997 by community, business, and government leaders. Envision Utah serves as a nonpartisan facilitator that connects community members, stakeholders, and decision makers to ensure all Utahns have a voice in the decisions that impact their future. To learn more, visit [envisionutah.org](https://envisionutah.org).

## HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This guide is an informative tool for city staff, officials, planners, and the general public to learn more about creating centers as a strategy to accommodate Utah's growing population while maintaining our high quality of life. This document discusses the major components and benefits of centers and provides some tips on how to bring them to life in your community. Throughout this document, you'll find great examples of vibrant and thriving communities that exemplify principles of centers.

## FUNDERS

Thank you to our many funders that contributed to this effort. We'd like to extend a special thanks to the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation.

Architectural Nexus

The Church of Jesus Christ of  
Latter-day Saints

Daybreak Communities

FFKR Architects

Fidelity Investments

GSBS Architects

Horrocks Engineers

Ivory Homes

Marriner S. Eccles Foundation

Morgan Stanley

Office of Property Rights Ombudsman

Perry Homes

Rocky Mountain Power

Utah Transit Authority

Wasatch Front Regional Council

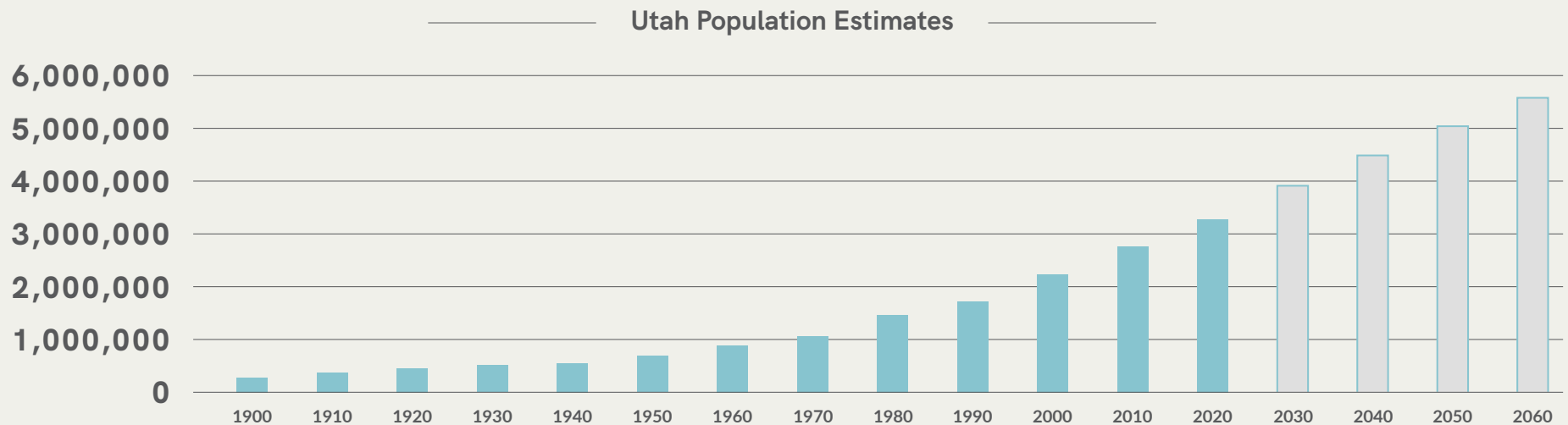
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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRO TO CENTERS

## HOW WE GROW MATTERS

Utah's population is rapidly growing in a geographically constrained space where increasing traffic, poor air quality, and limited water are continuous challenges. The region's housing stock has not kept pace with population growth, threatening the housing affordability that once set the area apart from other metropolitan regions in the U.S. Our major freeways and highways are reaching the limits of their ability to accommodate traffic. As our urbanized valleys fill up their last open spaces with new homes and businesses, better solutions are needed to preserve the existing quality of life while accommodating growth.

In addition, many existing trends—such as increased teleworking, greater reliance on e-commerce, and more time spent outdoors—have only intensified since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating the kind of future Utahns want amid this change will require careful planning. Utah communities can meet these challenges in our existing environment by establishing a network of places throughout the region where Utahns can easily access the spaces where they live, work, play, and learn. These places are called centers.



*The Census Bureau ranked Utah first in the nation in total population growth since 2010, with 15.5% growth.<sup>1,2,3</sup>*



## WHAT IS A CENTER?

A center is a walkable, mixed-use location in a region, city, or neighborhood that provides a variety of amenities and services.

Centers draw people from surrounding neighborhoods and serve as lively, central locations for people to gather while also highlighting the unique features and history of an area.

All centers share three fundamental components:

- 1. A mix of residential, commercial, office, recreation, and/or civic spaces, in a higher concentration than surrounding neighborhoods.**
- 2. Access to regional transportation via car, public transportation, bike, and/or foot.**
- 3. A walkable design that encourages visitors to explore and interact.**

These are baseline qualities of a center, and this guide touches on many strategies that work to achieve these characteristics. Additional consideration for the community and its future can ensure a center is a great place that benefits an area. The more an area is built or evolves to implement the strategies in this guide, the better that place can serve as a center that meets the needs of Utah families and businesses.



CENTER STREET, LOGAN



UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD, PROVO



## CENTERS COME IN A RANGE OF SCALES

Centers take many different shapes and forms, ranging from a place with high-rise buildings like downtown Salt Lake City to a school, park, or church at the center of a neighborhood. Along the Wasatch Front, centers are typically classified by size, with larger centers designed to serve bigger regions. The Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) defines four scales of centers: neighborhood, city, urban, and metropolitan.



NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

Neighborhood centers are in residential communities and serve roughly a two-mile radius. They include local shopping, restaurants, churches, elementary schools, libraries, and pharmacies. They are located at the intersection of collector roads and may be served by bus. Buildings in neighborhood centers are generally taller and more prominent than surrounding neighborhood buildings.



CITY CENTER

City centers are located on arterial intersections or along public transportation routes and serve people within a three- to five-mile radius. These centers generally include retail, healthcare, education, residential, office, and other civic buildings.



URBAN CENTER

Urban centers are generally built near freeway exits and permanent transit infrastructure like rail or bus rapid transit. These centers serve neighborhoods within a five-mile radius and include retail, healthcare, education, residential, office, and other civic spaces. Urban centers are generally anchored by significant employment and shopping and by multistory housing.



METROPOLITAN CENTER

Metropolitan centers are generally built near rail and freeways and serve half a million or more people. These centers include around 1,000,000 square feet of retail, healthcare, education, civic, and office spaces on 100 or more acres. They include unique regional entertainment.



## LOCATION IS IMPORTANT

Centers directly benefit the people in nearby communities by bringing amenities closer to home and creating opportunities to walk and bike. They further provide opportunities for cities' economic development. Centers provide the most function and benefit, however, when connected as part of a network.

Centers of different scales should be spaced throughout the region and connected by robust transportation corridors to provide accessible amenities while remaining economically viable. Small centers may be served by arterial roads or bus stops, and larger centers should be developed along freeways and regional public transit like the FrontRunner or TRAX. Strong coordination of land use and transportation allows a network of centers to provide significant benefits to the region such as improved air quality, more efficient use of infrastructure, and a reduced development footprint.



## BENEFITS OF CENTERS



More options for clean, efficient, and convenient travel.



Increased availability of housing options close to jobs, recreation, amenities, and transportation.



Enhanced public health and improved air quality.



Better fiscal sustainability within cities.



Revitalization of neighborhoods and cultivation of local identity.



Well-planned neighborhoods and conservation of agriculture and open space.



## CENTERS ARE A UTAH TRADITION

**Walkable main streets have been a Utah tradition since the Latter-day Saint pioneers settled here.** Utah's urban valleys began as a network of "downtowns" that served as central spaces for the settlers to buy needed goods and access services. They also served as cultural centers, with churches, city halls, schools, and parks. Joseph Smith's iconic "Plat of Zion" ensured these areas were well connected and set the stage for the gridded street network in many of Utah's historic towns today.

After World War II, development began to separate housing from jobs and amenities. Main streets and town centers disappeared as services moved to strip malls and shopping centers with large parking lots. Centers provide a way to re-establish these historic main streets and downtowns to create lively places and increase access to opportunities for all people in our communities.



MAIN STREET AND 200 SOUTH | SALT LAKE CITY, 1909



MAIN STREET | PARK CITY (DATE UNKNOWN)



WASHINGTON BOULEVARD | OGDEN, 1937



MAIN STREET | CEDAR CITY, 1938

The above photos are used with permission from the Utah State Historical Society.





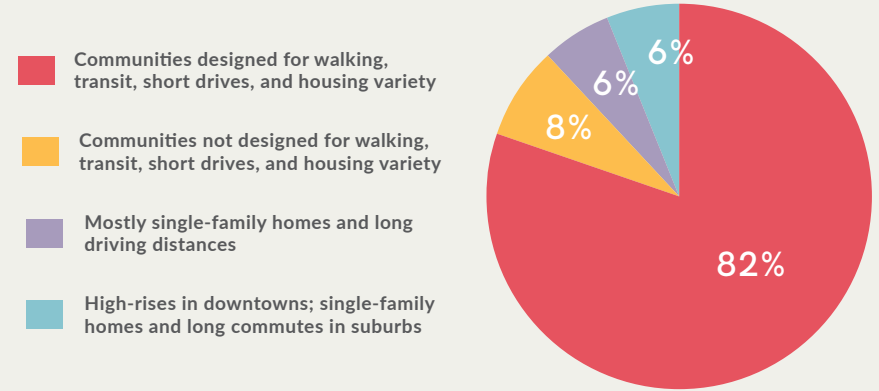
# CENTERS IN STATE AND REGIONAL VISIONS

## YOUR UTAH, YOUR FUTURE

Your Utah, Your Future (YUYF), which engaged over 50,000 Utahns, is a statewide vision for 2050 that establishes a clear context, framework, and direction for policy decisions and actions to achieve Utahns’ desired future. A network of centers was identified as a crosscutting solution for many of the YUYF topics, including transportation, water, air quality, disaster resilience, economy, and housing.

Learn more about the Your Utah, Your Future [here](#).

## Utahns’ Transportation and Communities Preferences



## WASATCH CHOICE

Wasatch Choice is a shared community vision that considers the Wasatch Front’s rapid population growth and serves as a blueprint for transportation investments, development patterns, and economic opportunities. Wasatch Choice identifies many centers throughout the Wasatch Front as key components of the growth strategy through 2050. The vision was built through collaboration with local governments and facilitated by Wasatch Front Regional Council and Mountainland Association of Governments.

Learn more about Wasatch Choice [here](#).



# WASATCH CHOICE

## VISION



# CHAPTER TWO: WHAT'S IN A CENTER?

*Great centers incorporate several key land-use components.*

## MIXED USE

**Successful centers are vibrant, attractive places that provide a variety of destinations close to one another and close to housing.**

Good centers include more than one of the following uses:

- Housing, like apartments, townhomes, and condos
- Retail, like clothing stores and restaurants
- Office space
- Public spaces, like parks, open spaces, and plazas
- Civic places, like schools, churches, and libraries

The same building could host more than one use—e.g., with housing upstairs and retail downstairs—or different uses could simply be in the same proximate area, with buildings close together.

People must be able to travel a short distance from one use to another without having to use a large arterial roadway. Concentrated destinations are a key benefit that makes centers attractive places for tourists and the local community.

## CENTERS VS. STRIP MALLS

Many communities have areas with multiple businesses or uses, but these areas were often built to prioritize cars, with large parking lots and few walking paths. These spaces typically do not include housing.

These areas may serve their communities well, but as Utah grows, revitalizing these areas and creating new centers will help accommodate that growth in a way that ensures a high quality of life.



## HOUSING

Housing is one of the most important uses to integrate in a center. People living within a center have convenient access to desirable destinations and experience reduced transportation costs. Incorporating housing ensures that people can easily travel from home to various destinations and that businesses within the center have regular visitors. Further, Utah is experiencing a housing shortage, and affordability constraints are increasing the demand for options like townhomes, condos, and apartments. Centers provide a place to expand housing options without disrupting existing neighborhoods.

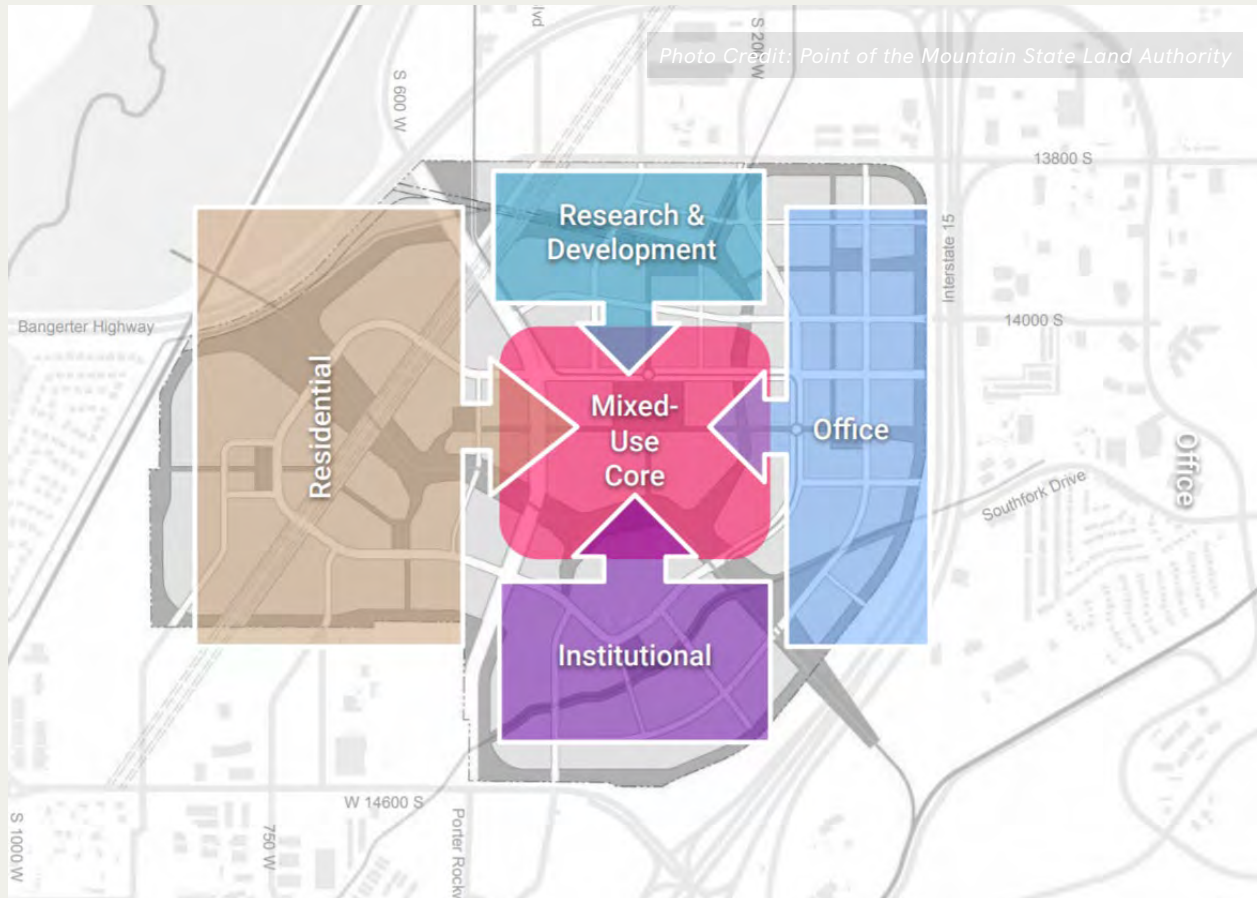
**As our shopping patterns change, it will become more critical to include nonretail destinations in centers such as schools, libraries, or office buildings.** Creating a center can be as simple as incorporating housing, experiential retail, and food services near these key community anchors.



*Including housing near downtown hubs like Provo and Salt Lake City provides residents with easy access to urban amenities such as dining, shopping, and transit. It also helps meet the growing demand for housing supply.*



**If a community cannot confidently predict the market, local regulations should be flexible in the land uses permitted, allowing property owners to respond to economic opportunities.** Zoning a space for multiple uses allows it to easily respond if market demand shifts. For example, strictly zoning a space for retail only may force commercial streets and districts to decline. Similarly, a rigid requirement of retail on the ground floor of a building may ensure that the ground floor remains vacant.



This conceptual area map for the Draper prison site highlights a mixed-use core supported by surrounding residential, office, and institutional uses. This map was used as part of a scenarios exercise for the Point of the Mountain. Learn more at [thepointutah.org](http://thepointutah.org).

## USING FORM-BASED CODE

Form-based code (FBC) is one tool communities can use to regulate land use in a way that not only is flexible but also creates a desired look and feel for a space.

A form-based code is a land-development regulation that deals with the design of the buildings and streets rather than the use of the spaces. This tool shifts communities away from standard zoning, which focuses on planning by use, placing more emphasis on building facades, sidewalk width, building height, etc.

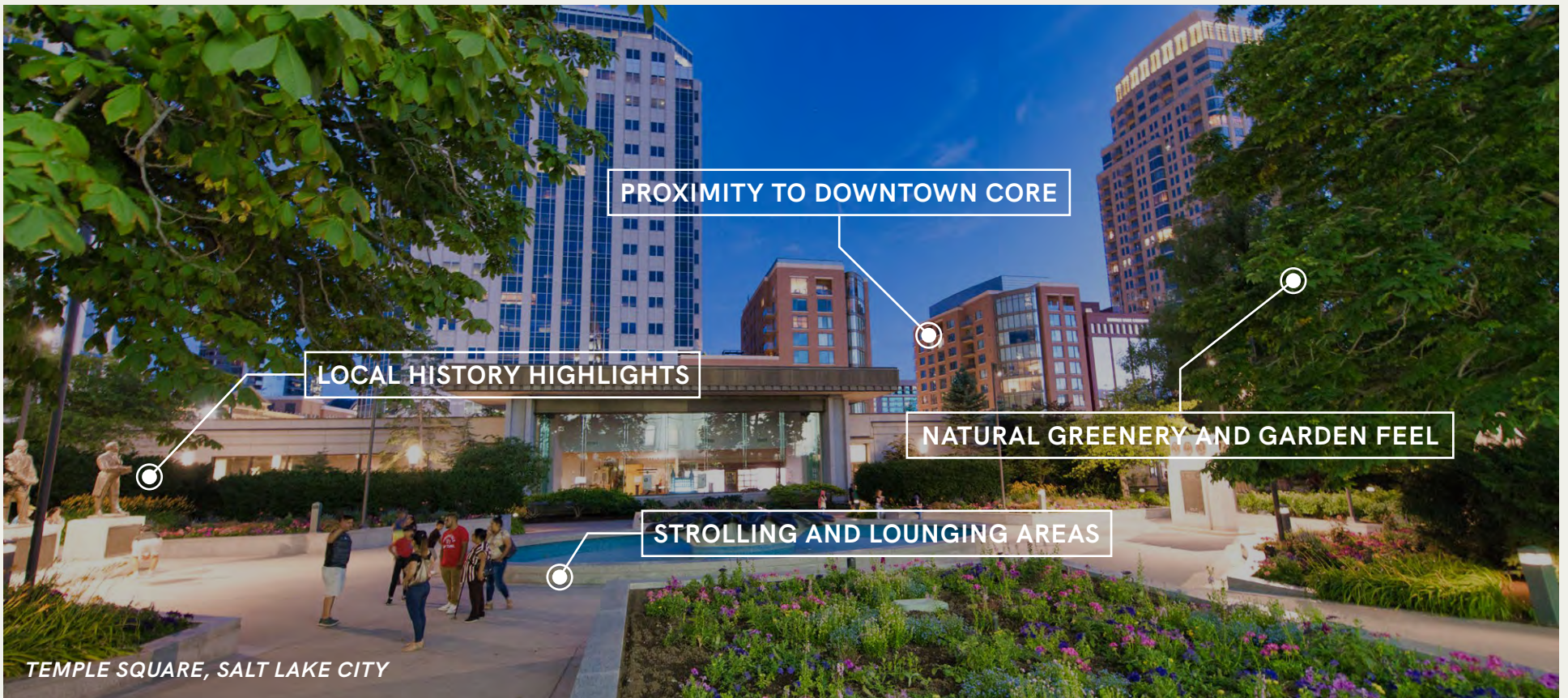
Using an FBC can encourage developers to consider the relationship between new development and the existing built environment. An FBC ensures that development matches the desired urban form and contributes to the sense of place. [Click here to access the Wasatch Choice FBC template.](#)



## USABLE PUBLIC SPACE

**Most of Utah's residents live within urbanized areas, so part of their quality of life depends on the prevalence of public space and the design of their local urban environment.**

A center can create a desirable environment by providing welcoming, safe, and well-managed public spaces where the built environment is interwoven with community gathering areas and open space. Centers allow cities to take advantage of existing open space and designate additional public spaces. Public space complements and balances other development in a center and is a valuable amenity for those living nearby.





Proximity and accessibility to open space are important factors to consider when planning and designing a center. Public spaces should help center the neighborhood and should not be more than a few minutes' walk from other destinations. Restaurants, housing, shopping, and offices that provide pedestrian traffic are good for lining public spaces. Enjoyable gathering space also increases the likelihood that visitors will linger, improving vitality and business patronage. Where feasible, public spaces should be in a central location in front of buildings.

In order to be truly usable, gathering spaces should accommodate neighborhood needs and include features such as benches, walking paths, plaques, picnic tables, or shade covers. Public open space should be well lit and appropriately maintained and could include parks, plazas, playgrounds, sporting fields, stream corridors, trails, community gardens, or nature preserves.



## EXPERIENCES AND CREATIVE RETAIL

Online shopping has transformed how, where, and when we shop. Consumers increasingly prefer online shopping to brick-and-mortar stores. As a result, traditional malls, big-box stores, and strip development—the pervasive commercial centers of postwar America—are declining.

**These shifts present an opportunity for Utah's cities and towns to rethink their commercial areas and shift toward more centered development that focuses on placemaking and vibrancy.**

Today's shoppers are spending less on goods and more on services and experiences such as dining out, concerts, and festivals. As a result, we need to prioritize activities and event spaces within our retail areas. Retail companies are investing more in creating experiences such as interactive merchandise or photo opportunities to bring people to their stores. Centers can be flexible and adapt to changing consumer patterns and also provide attractive and unique spaces where experience-minded consumers can feel a sense of excitement and discovery.



*Event space can be incorporated into centers to host events such as movie nights and concerts. This is a key amenity that provides more opportunities to engage a broader audience than shopping alone can.*



*The annual Downtown Farmers Market attracts dozens of local vendors and hundreds of visitors every weekend during the summer. This helps support businesses directly adjacent to the park and throughout downtown.*



## CHANGING RETAIL NEEDS AT THE GATEWAY

Olympic Legacy Plaza in the Gateway Mall in downtown Salt Lake City is an excellent example of a place that is embracing experience-based retail by creating an attractive gathering space.

The Gateway includes a mix of retail, services, office space, and apartments. The Olympic Plaza, located on the north end of the mall, hosts a water fountain for kids and plenty of space for gathering.

The plaza hosts events throughout the year that are open to the public, such as movie nights, dance classes, art markets, food festivals, and even goat yoga.

The Gateway is a dynamic place that attracts families and young adults through engaging events, leading to more success for the companies that lease in the mall.



Photo Credit: Vestar





## LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

The best centers blend into the fabric of the surrounding community. Neighborhood centers, for example, should strive to recreate the village or small-town main street. They should be places where the community can gather and where it feels safe to walk to local shops and businesses. **Most importantly, a center should feel unique to that specific community.**

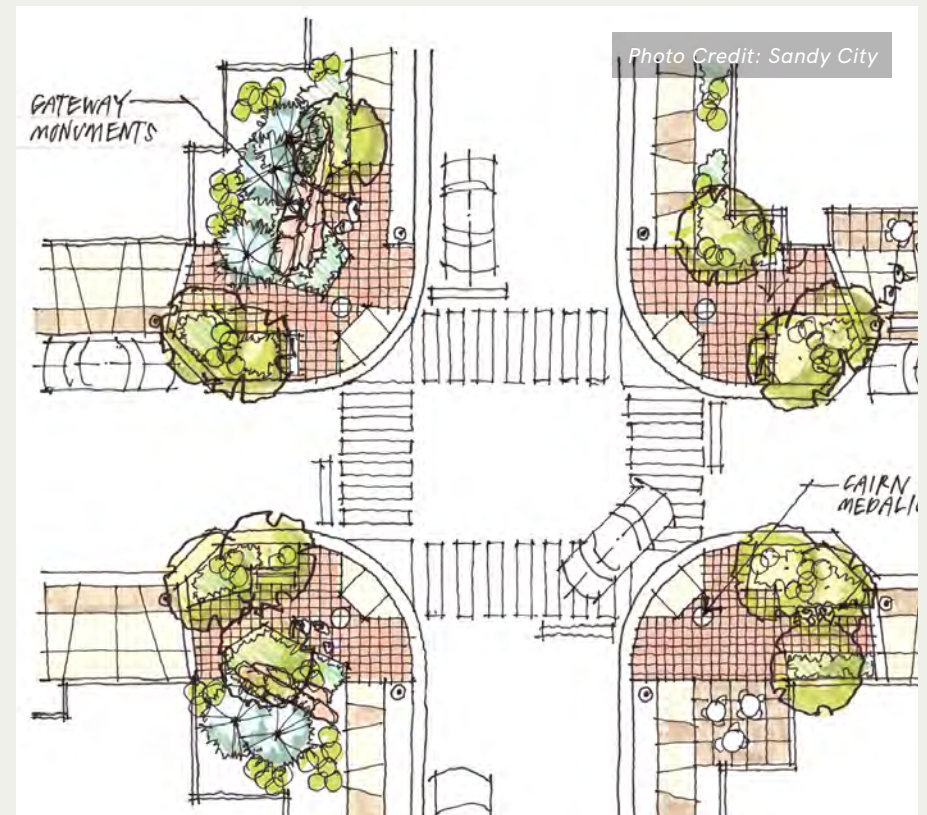
Park City is a national hub for skiers, many of whom travel annually to Utah for the world-class ski resorts. Thus, the downtown area is designed around the ski resorts with restaurants accessible directly off the slopes, as highlighted in the photos below. Monuments of the 2002 Winter Olympics honor the unique history and character of the area.

Creating centers based on the local community can also mean planning for kids' play areas, dog parks, active recreation, or a community garden. In rural areas, it may make sense to invest in infrastructure that supports equestrian activities.



*This Park City bridge was designed to help pedestrians and bikers safely cross over a busy street. In the winter, the bridge provides direct access to a chairlift (highlighted in the bottom right corner of the second photo).*





*Design standards in Sandy City's center, The Cairns, support cohesive development and branding as properties evolve over time.*

Centers can be valuable in maintaining a community's culture and feel because they can draw on and amplify the character of the area. Design standards are a useful tool that can encourage developers to construct quality centers that the community finds attractive. Features like roof treatments, reliefs, and façade varieties that are designed at the pedestrian scale and connect to the street front can help develop a center that celebrates local heritage and expresses unique community character. Design standards should be carefully planned to balance community appeal with additional development costs.

Engaging local residents is very useful for understanding their needs and perceptions on what makes the community special. See more about engagement tools and working with the public in chapter 5.



## EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY CULTURE



Photo Credit: Daniel Knight, Gardner Village

*Gardner Village fosters an attractive, antique atmosphere where people can connect with the pioneer history of the West Jordan flour mill and silo.*



Photo Credit: jovannig - stock.adobe.com

*The Delicate Arch is a defining feature of the red rock country around Moab, Utah. Many stylistic renderings of the geologic feature can be found throughout the city.*



*Public art in St. George depicts major destinations in and around the city that define the area.*



Photo Credit: MelissaMN - stock.adobe.com

*Vernal and other communities in northeastern Utah are well known for their proximity to Dinosaur National Monument. These artistic depictions help cultivate a regional identity.*



# CHAPTER THREE: MOVING TO AND THROUGH CENTERS

*Successful centers incorporate various transportation strategies.*

## REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

A complete center will meet many people's daily needs, so transportation connections are critical components to ensure access to centers is convenient.

**Centers thrive when they are built near high-capacity transportation infrastructure like major roads, freeways, or public transportation stops.**

Proximity to large-capacity transportation infrastructure ensures convenient travel for residents and visitors. It further makes the center accessible to a much broader region through different modes.

Freeways, highways, and FrontRunner lines can be difficult for pedestrians to cross, so centers should be planned to take advantage of access to the facility while making sure the center is still walkable by, for example, developing the center to one side of these facilities.

Areas with high pedestrian traffic may need to be buffered from major transportation arteries. Buffering can be done by placing commercial spaces or other uses that benefit from high auto access closer to transportation infrastructure.



*The TRAX station at Daybreak provides easy access to housing, shopping, dining, and other amenities without deterring from walkability.*



## TRAFFIC-CALMING STRATEGIES

Traffic-calming strategies such as fewer or narrower lanes, larger medians, traffic circles, one-way couplets, and extended curbs can improve walkability and signal to drivers that they are transitioning from a highway or arterial to a center.



*Downtown Salt Lake City (left) utilizes wide medians, crosswalks, extended curbs, and street art to slow traffic and prioritize the pedestrian experience. On-street parking in Park City's Main Street (top right) helps meet parking needs while narrowing the road. The large roundabout at 9th and 9th in Salt Lake City (bottom right) replaced a dangerous five-way intersection and allows for safer, more regulated traffic flow.*



## STREET CONNECTIVITY

A well-connected network of streets within and around a center ensures convenient access for a variety of travel options. **Interconnected streets provide safer and more direct walking and biking routes and disperse traffic, as opposed to winding dead-end streets or cul-de-sacs that force traffic onto high-speed arterials.** Good street connectivity makes traffic more efficient and improves safety.

Many of Utah's pioneer towns were founded with a grid network, which maximizes connectivity. A grid network provides several paths to reach any destination, which makes a large area accessible within many different travel times. It also allows people to travel direct routes on smaller local streets, increasing the safety and convenience of walking and biking.



*The street grid—as seen in many Utah cities—achieves the best connectivity. A grid provides many route options to a destination, which improves accessibility for multiple transportation methods.*



*Cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads—often found in suburbs—present barriers to pedestrians and cyclists. They also lead to increased traffic and travel time.*



Where it's not possible to connect streets, it may be feasible to add pedestrian or bike connections.

For example, Salt Lake City's ten-acre blocks hinder walkability. Breaking up these distances with midblock pathways decreases walk time and creates opportunities for an improved pedestrian experience.

Pedestrian and bike pathways are also a way to connect cul-de-sacs without the expense and disruption of extending the street.



*Regent Street in downtown Salt Lake City provides a midblock pedestrian connection that includes restaurants and shopping opportunities.*

## THE UTAH STREET CONNECTIVITY GUIDE

The Utah Street Connectivity Guide is a valuable resource for creating or improving a center. This tool was jointly created by the Mountainland Association of Governments, Wasatch Front Regional Council, Utah Transit Authority, and Utah Department of Transportation to provide information on defining street connectivity and measuring connectivity in your area.

The guide highlights the direct and indirect benefits that connectivity brings to a community and covers strategies and best practices for how to increase connectivity. Case studies on issues and considerations at different scales make this resource useful in a variety of contexts. [Click here to see the guide.](#)



## WALKABLE DESIGN

**Within the center, the pedestrian experience is critical.** Visitors are more likely to interact with businesses and utilize open space when places are engaging and friendly to pedestrians. The space must be interesting for someone who is walking rather than for someone in a car on a highway. This means centers should have smaller signs placed at eye level, buildings close to the street, doors that open to sidewalks, clearly marked and well-maintained pathways, and places to stop and sit.

Great centers often have narrower streets and closer buildings to improve walkability and safety. Interactive space design—such as outdoor patios at restaurants and glass windows at boutiques—supports street activity.



*Street furniture in downtown Logan scales a space for pedestrians and makes it feel safe. Outdoor seating for businesses invites engagement from passersby and creates vitality.*



*An enclosed pedestrian bridge connects City Creek Center across Main Street to provide a beautiful experience of downtown Salt Lake City all year-round. Engaging and safe walking experiences increase the desirability of active transportation modes like walking and biking.*





## COMPLETE STREETS

Streets that serve the needs of cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians are known as complete streets. Complete streets may feature wide sidewalks and bike lanes as well as special lanes for public transportation. These features allow for balanced access to several convenient and safe travel options.

Other design elements that improve the safety and convenience of walking or cycling include well-marked crosswalks, narrower driving lanes, slower posted speeds, and center medians. On-street parking, park strips, plantings, artwork, or furniture also help to buffer pedestrians from traffic.



### DESIGNING COMPLETE STREETS

The StreetPlan tool at [streetplan.net](https://streetplan.net) is an excellent resource for designing and visualizing complete streets.

This free online tool allows you to construct and modify different elements of a road including lanes, sidewalks, medians, setbacks, street furniture, and land uses.

The tool incorporates guidance on best practices and allows users to easily experiment with various ways of transforming standard thoroughfares into complete streets. The interface makes instant adjustments and generates quick renderings, which makes it ideal for both internal work and public engagement.



# THOUGHTFUL PARKING

**Parking may be the greatest challenge to well-designed centers.** Parking is important for convenient auto access, yet it is nearly impossible to have a walkable center while also providing large parking lots in front of each building.

These lots increase walking distances, detract from the pedestrian experience, and disrupt street connectivity. Moreover, unused parking lots create dead zones that dampen the vitality of communities and decrease the attractiveness of the area. Excess parking can even impede affordable housing by artificially driving up the cost of vacant land and reducing the amount of municipal tax revenue per acre.



## THE STATE OF PARKING



At ten sites studied in Orem, observed parking supply exceeded observed demand at every site. Seven of the sites had observed parking occupancy rates at less than **75 percent**.<sup>4</sup>



Five case studies of transit-oriented developments showed that walking, bus, and rail were key transportation options. Observed automobile road share was just **23 percent** at one site.<sup>5</sup>



Vehicle trips in transit-oriented developments were observed at **less than half** of the rates predicted by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE).<sup>5</sup>



The average American car is driven only **5 percent** of the time and is parked for the rest.<sup>6</sup>



Around **50 percent** of the cars parked in free spaces stay longer than the posted time limit.<sup>6</sup>



*Public transportation, such as TRAX and bus rapid transit, that services shopping, dining, and housing dramatically reduces parking demand. Alternative transportation like bike shares, electric scooters, and ride-hailing services further reduce the need for large-surface parking lots.*

Parking needs in well-designed centers will be much lower than what the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) recommends, and cities that are planning centers should reduce parking requirements or even consider eliminating them altogether. ITE recommendations are based on peak demand in a suburban, auto-oriented environment with little to no transit service or pedestrian amenities.

These recommendations are becoming increasingly inflated due to transportation trends that are reducing parking demand, including ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, bike shares, and electric scooters. Online shopping is also turning many shopping and dining excursions into quick pick-up trips, further reducing parking demand.

**Negative impacts can be mitigated by conducting research to ensure the supply of parking matches demand and by being thoughtful in how lots and parking structures are designed.** Once parking has been “right sized” for your center, consider how the parking impacts the function and flow of the area. Parking should work to heighten overall connectivity, convenience, and walkability. Additionally, the area can be future-proofed by arranging parking lots strategically to allow for different uses as the center grows.



## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED PARKING DESIGN

In addition to ensuring parking spots do not exceed the need, those designing centers should consider the following strategies:



THE GATEWAY, SALT LAKE CITY

**Centralize parking** by placing spaces in a structure, underground, or in the center of a block or by locating parking away from primary pedestrian streets. Alternatively, parking can be buffered with vegetation or built to include commercial uses in the bottom level of the structure.



CITY HALL, PARK CITY

**Utilize shared parking reservoirs** in mixed-use centers to reuse parking spaces throughout the day. Residences, offices, restaurants, retail, churches, and gyms usually experience peak parking demands at different times of the day. When the same spaces serve several needs throughout the day, overall parking need is significantly lower.



**Include pedestrian navigation** in surface parking lots and structures. This includes paths that connect the parking spaces to the destination in a safe and pleasant manner. Features like signage, wayfinding, lighting, and walkways enhance the parking experience and help pedestrians with navigation.



**Provide on-street parking** to create a buffer between pedestrians and cyclists and the main road. This strategy also helps calm traffic by narrowing the road.



**Locate surface parking lots behind buildings** so entrances are on the street. This eliminates the need for pedestrians to navigate a parking lot to access the business and helps create active centers where people can easily see into and interact with shops from the sidewalk.



# CHAPTER FOUR: REGIONAL BENEFITS

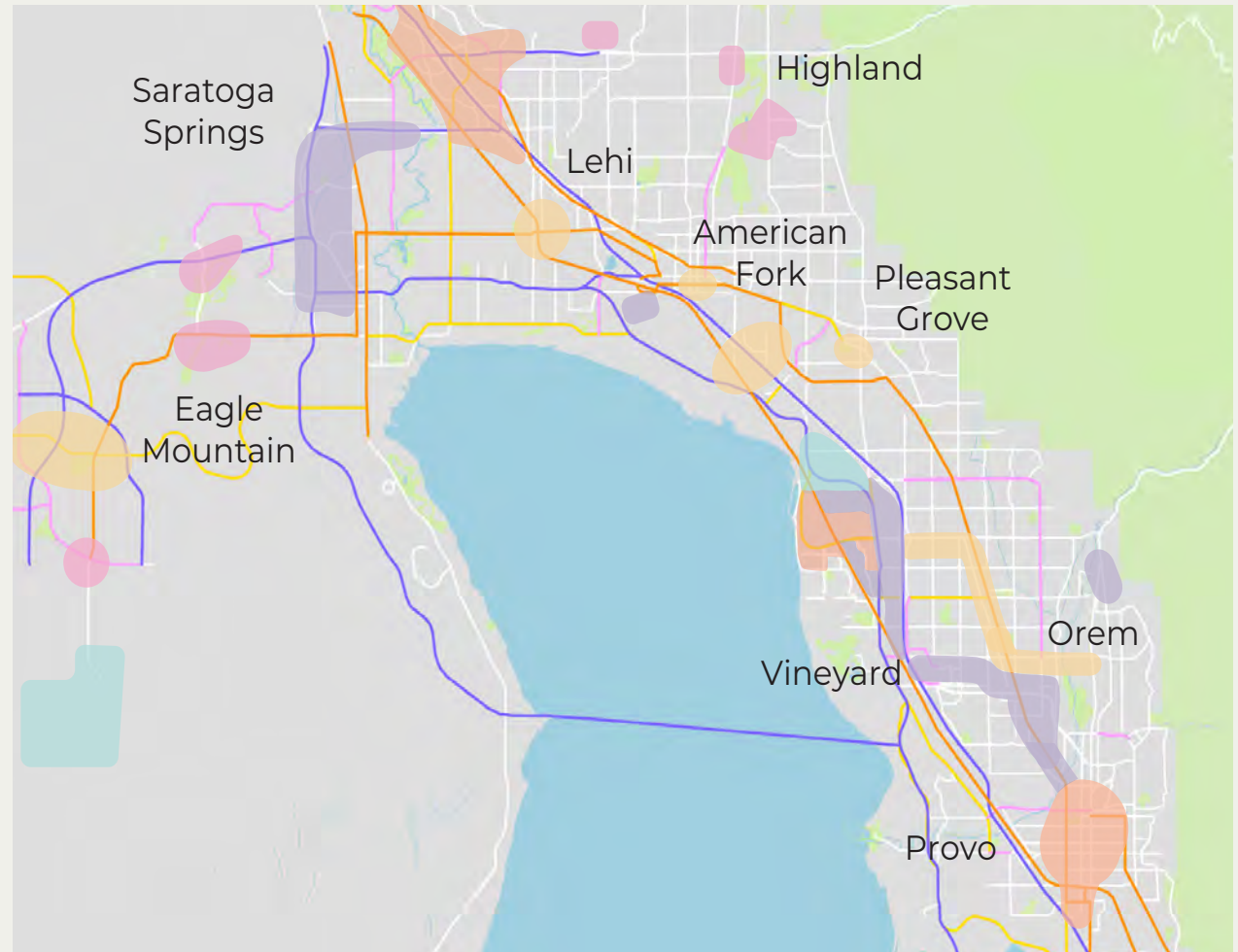
*A network of centers amplifies the benefits of a single center.*

## BUILDING A NETWORK

A single center provides a number of benefits directly to the local community. And a well-connected network of centers throughout the region amplifies these benefits while also addressing many of the challenges our cities and towns are currently facing.

A network can be achieved by developing centers of different scales in strategic locations throughout the region. It's important to ensure they are connected by robust car, bike, and public transportation infrastructure.

Establishing a range of centers throughout Utah's population cores will make it easier for all Utahns to access beautiful and desirable places that meet their needs for housing, employment, recreation, education, healthcare, and more.



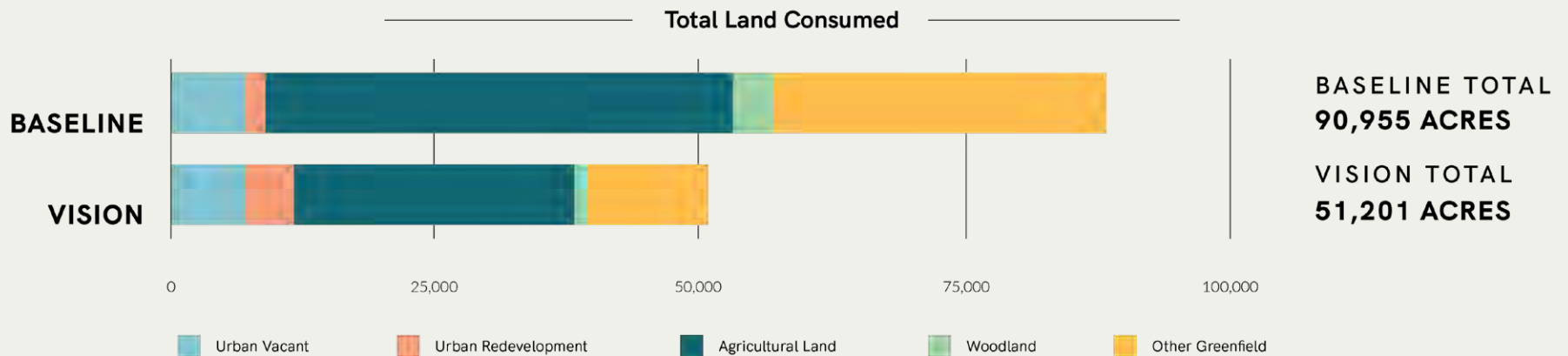
*The Utah County 2050 Vision imagines a network of centers to provide infrastructure and amenities for the rapidly growing population to live, work, learn, and recreate. Various colors reflect centers of different scales, and roads show the connectivity between centers. To learn more about the visionary centers map for Utah County, visit [utahvalleyvisioning.org](http://utahvalleyvisioning.org).*



## REDUCING THE URBAN FOOTPRINT

Centers offer communities attractive, convenient spaces for new housing and other buildings in concentrated areas. This provides a number of benefits. When new growth can be accommodated in centers, communities don't have to develop as much open space or agricultural land.

Additionally, denser development in centers reduces infrastructure costs by saving miles of roads, pipes, power lines, and other utilities that would be required in more spread-out developments. It also ensures that new growth is supported by existing and planned transportation investments. Finally, a smaller development footprint requires less water for outdoor landscaping and improves air quality by reducing travel distances for many residents.



*Modeling for the Utah Valley Visioning project found that Utah County would save nearly 40,000 acres of land by adopting a centered development approach from 2020 to 2050.<sup>7</sup>*



## MEETING HOUSING NEEDS

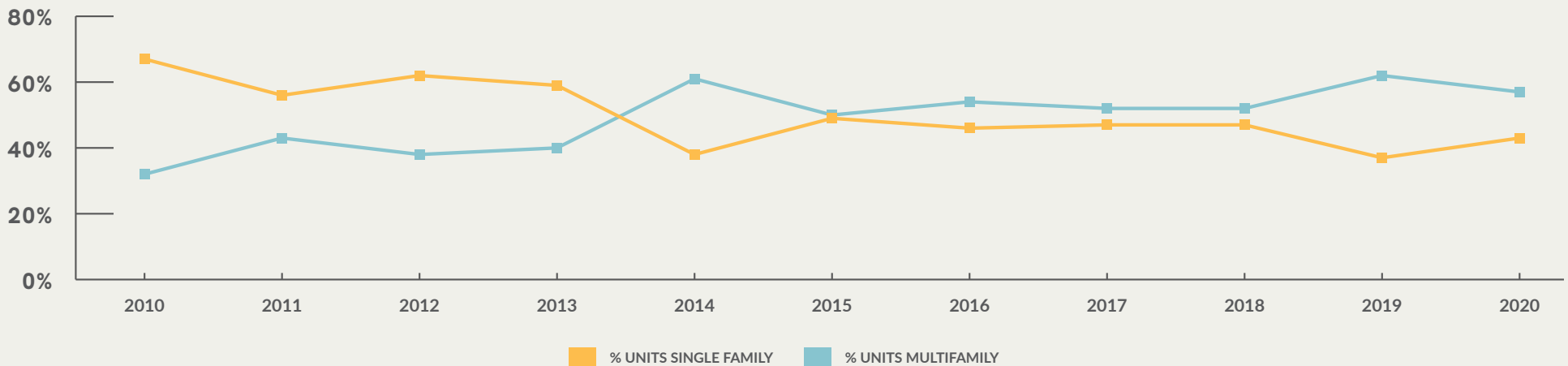
Utah’s strong economy, high quality of life, and large families have fueled rapid population growth. Unfortunately, housing construction has not kept up, meaning housing availability is limited in the state’s most populated valleys. This has caused housing costs to skyrocket. To make matters worse, these same valleys contain the bulk of Utah’s jobs. This means it is increasingly difficult for residents to find affordable, high-quality housing close to work.

As Utah’s population continues to grow, cities and developers have an opportunity to decide how best to accommodate new housing and services. Centers are a powerful growth strategy to both increase housing supply and generate a more diverse housing mix.

### PREFERENCES AND NEEDS VS. AVAILABILITY

Market demand in the Wasatch Front has shifted away from large-lot single-family homes to more affordable and more compact products. Currently, there is not enough of this type of development in our valleys to meet the demand, which further drives up housing costs in more walkable neighborhoods. Centers present an opportunity to create well-connected communities that relieve the housing shortage and give buyers more housing options in our most urban valleys.

Wasatch Front Permitted Units



*In the last decade, the Wasatch Front has shifted to building more multifamily than single-family units. This shift has been caused in part by affordability challenges and by changing preferences.<sup>8</sup>*



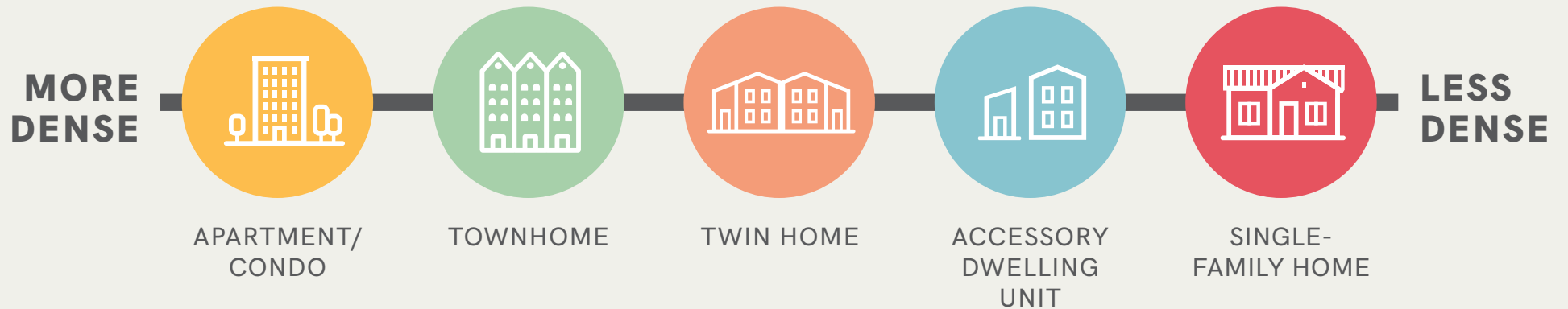


Many residents are looking for options other than standard urban apartments or suburban single-family homes. Communities can meet this demand by providing a full mix of housing types including townhomes, twin homes, condominiums, apartments, mother-in-law apartments, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and single-family homes with a variety of yard sizes.

This kind of market-based variety gives people flexibility and freedom to choose where they live in different circumstances or stages of life. It also fosters greater economic diversity and allows for people such as teachers and firefighters to live within the communities they serve.

Compact-housing options also help residents save money on housing, transportation, utilities, taxes, and fees. Centers create opportunities for a more diverse mix of housing in spaces that are attractive for the entire community and well supported by transportation infrastructure.

On a broader scale, creating or restoring a pattern of centers with a variety of housing throughout the valley will ensure all Utahns can have the opportunity to live in beautiful neighborhoods in the kinds of homes they want and can afford, with the things they need nearby.



## FOSTERING A SENSE OF PLACE AND LOCAL IDENTITY

Centers can create enjoyable, welcoming, and memorable gathering spots that foster a strong sense of local identity. This helps distinguish a neighborhood or city from nearby communities. A neighborhood or town center in a small town or rural setting, for example, can provide notable places for visitors while also creating a sense of pride for its residents.

Further, centers increase opportunities for social interaction, which helps cultivate a sense of safety and community. Centers can make locals feel at home and help visitors feel they are somewhere special. One aim of restoring centers is to revive a sense of character and to celebrate the small-town community feel and identity of cities in Utah's growing regions.

See chapter 2 for more details and examples on how to accomplish this.



*Utah's Tony award-winning Shakespeare Festival attracts over 130,000 people to Cedar City annually. This memorable five-month event provides entertainment for visitors of the nearby national parks while also positioning Cedar City as a hub for theater and art education.*





## INCREASING TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

Communities that are designed for walking, public transportation, biking, and short drives improve the convenience of travel, expand travel options, and reduce the cost of living. For example, Envision Utah projected that centered growth in Utah County could lead to an average annual savings of over \$2,000 per household in 2050.

Having a network of centers throughout a metropolitan area also reduces the overall amount of driving by bringing places closer to people. Reducing driving has tremendous benefits for traffic, air quality, and infrastructure costs.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Community resources and housing options in every city—connected through a distributed network of centers and an efficient system of public transportation—help reduce or eliminate physical barriers to jobs and services. Placing employers and education facilities in centers at transportation nodes increases the accessibility of these economic opportunities.



## PROMOTING HEALTHIER LIVING AND IMPROVED AIR QUALITY

Utahns love spending time outdoors—especially with family or friends. However, navigating many Utah communities as a pedestrian or a cyclist, particularly with children, can be challenging due to unsafe conditions like high vehicle speeds and a lack of dedicated infrastructure. Local centers give more people the opportunity to get out of their cars and enjoy walking or biking.

Additionally, vehicles account for around 40 percent of our state’s air pollution. Centers reduce the need for traveling long distances and can eliminate a vehicle trip altogether by increasing the convenience, accessibility, and safety of other forms of transportation. This reduces emissions and improves air quality.



*Centered development can reduce or shorten vehicle trips, which can positively impact our regional air quality. Learn more about Utah’s air quality at [yourairyourutah.org](http://yourairyourutah.org).*





*DAYBREAK, SOUTH JORDAN*

*New development defines communities for years to come, but the long-term financial impact is sometimes overlooked in the approval process. Detailed analysis shows that the Daybreak development provides significantly more net tax revenue than nearby single-family neighborhoods.*

## ENSURING FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Towns, cities, and counties regularly make decisions about how to grow and what kind of development to allow. These decisions shape entire neighborhoods and form the foundation of communities as we know them. They also have enormous implications for a municipality's finances. Research has shown that higher-density developments that are well connected to existing transportation infrastructure are less costly to the public sector. Every municipality considering new development should understand the financial implications of these options.

The Wasatch Choice Regional Vision forecasts that increasing the centered growth in the region to the level outlined in the vision would save local governments approximately \$2.3 billion simply because cities would need to provide less infrastructure like roads and utilities to serve new development. Cost savings multiply over time since roads and infrastructure must be periodically maintained and replaced.



# CHAPTER FIVE: PLANNING A CENTER

*A successful center will take into account several principles.*

## EMBRACE THE PROCESS

There is no such thing as the perfect center. Centers should be unique to and achieve the goals of the local community. A center built for the lifestyle of downtown Salt Lake City, for example, may not be a good fit in Vernal.

The planning process will vary by center and may include different stakeholders, development timelines, funding sources, etc. Cities, planners, and developers should look to other sites in similar communities to learn from them, but ultimately the process and resulting center must be their own.

The goal is not to duplicate any of the existing centers in Utah but to harness the needs and strengths of your community to make a great place. Metrics should be developed for evaluating the success of your center in achieving its desired community functions.

To learn more about how centers are assessed, [click here for the 2019 report of the Wasatch Front Regional Council's State of the Centers.](#)

## — EXAMPLES OF CENTER METRICS —



### Transportation

- Mode Share
- Walking Opportunities
- Miles of New Bike Lanes
- Transit-Stop Density and Ridership
- Intersections per Square Mile
- Average Percent of Income Spent on Transportation



### Housing

- New Housing Units
- Residents per Acre
- Percent of Units Occupied
- Job-Housing Balance
- Average Percent of Income Spent on Housing
- Percent of Housing That Is Affordable (< 30%, 50%, 80% Area Median Income)



### Economics

- Tax Revenue
- Employment per Acre
- Infrastructure Maintenance Costs
- Commercial Occupancy and Rents
- Number of Residents in Catchment Area
- Commercial Market Value (Dollars per Square Foot)



### Sense of Place

- Land-Use Mix
- Number of Daily Visitors
- Event-Space Reservations
- Recognition of Community Branding
- Total Acres within the Center
- Households Near Open Space or Other Key Features

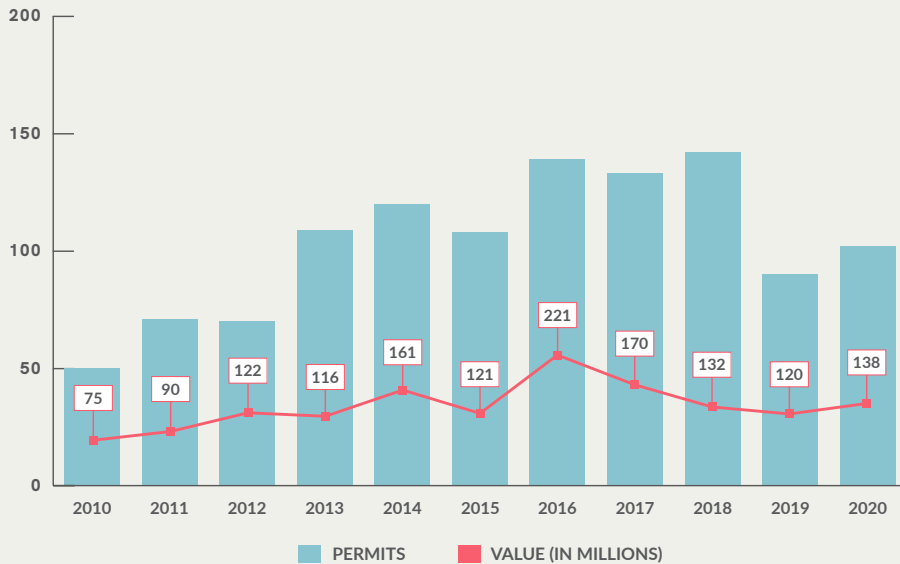


## MEETING MARKET DEMAND THROUGH RETROFITS

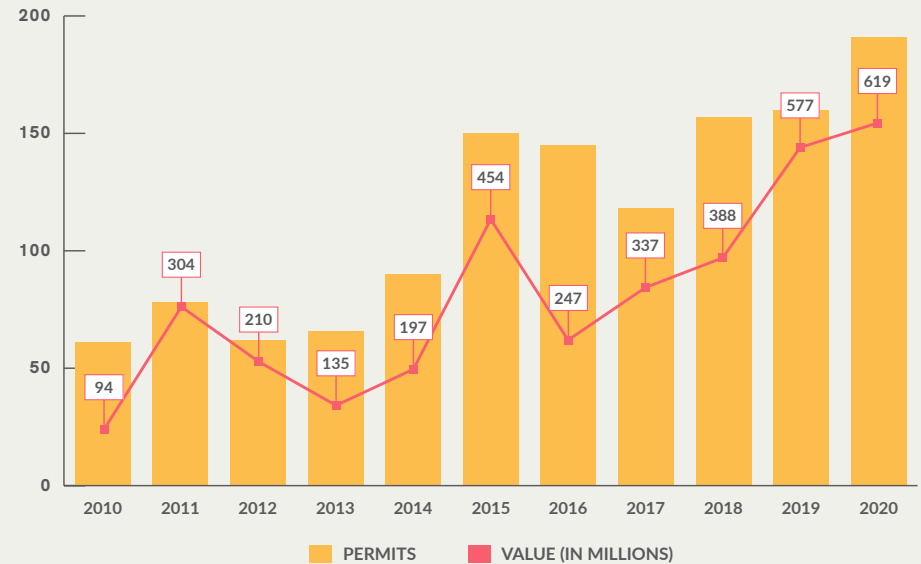
While planning commissions and city councils have significant control over what kind of development is allowed where, ultimately only buildings and land uses that can financially sustain themselves will endure. The market (i.e., supply and demand) should be studied when considering what to build in a community and where. Per capita demand for retail space and associated parking has been declining steadily for many years. This shift was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person shopping trips fell sharply while online retail thrived. Retail-dominated spaces are becoming less economically viable, and large portions of many store parking lots are unused year-round.

Cities and developers should view existing retail-only spaces as opportunities to meet other community needs, especially housing. Adding office and residential uses nearby can help support remaining retail businesses by increasing the daytime and night-time customer populations. In place of defunct retail or unused parking, municipalities can integrate one or many anchors of different uses that enrich the community, like museums, libraries, parks, event spaces, community centers, or splash pads. Upgrading internal circulation, external connections, and walkability can improve access, flow, and usability.

Wasatch Front Retail, Mercantile, and Restaurants



Wasatch Front Industrial, Warehouse, and Manufacturing



*In the Wasatch Front, the value of retail, mercantile, and restaurant development has declined since 2016. The value of this sector has remained significantly lower than other development types—such as industrial, warehouse, and manufacturing—during this same period.<sup>8</sup>*



Many commercial areas in Utah that developed after World War II lack the mix of uses, walkable design, and connectivity to function as true centers. These areas include strip malls, office parks, and big-box stores. Community needs are evolving, and there is an opportunity to reimagine these underutilized spaces as vibrant community centers.

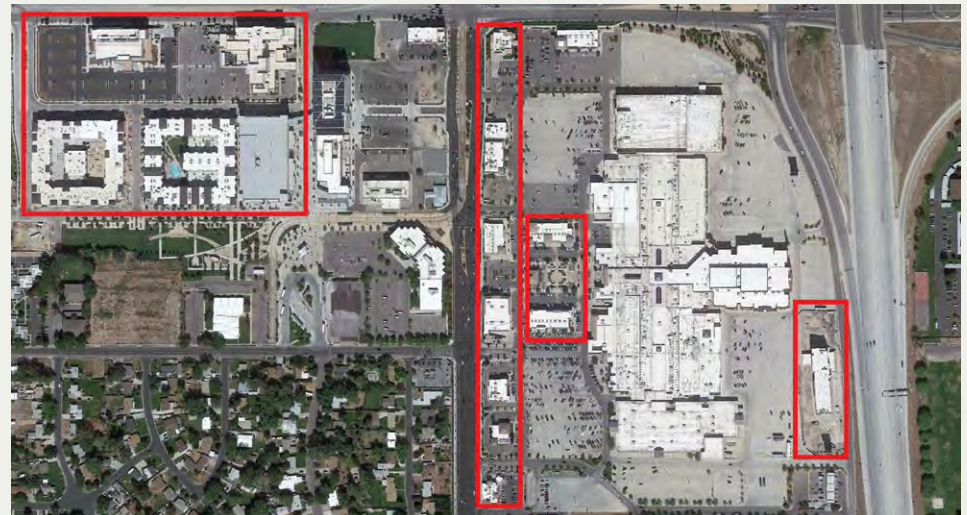
Transitioning these spaces into true centers may face significant challenges, including fragmented ownership and leases, poor access and circulation, dispersed parking areas, and parcel configurations that are not conducive to other uses.

The public sector can play key roles in retrofitting commercial areas by

- Acquiring and aggregating property.
- Reducing parking requirements.
- Changing streetscapes to improve walkability (widen sidewalks, introduce traffic-calming measures or crosswalks, add on-street parking, etc.).
- Adopting zoning that allows flexibility in uses.
- Adding civic uses (libraries, city halls, senior centers, etc.), open spaces (plazas, squares, etc.), or points of interest (fountains, outdoor art, seating areas, etc.).
- Using tax-increments or other financing mechanisms to fund infrastructure and affordable-housing costs.



*Fairbourne Station in 2006.*



*Fairbourne Station in 2020. Underutilized parking and parcels have transformed into an attractive center with numerous amenities.*



## REIMAGINING DOWNTOWN HOLLADAY

Holladay, landlocked and nearly built-out, faced the challenge of increasing its commercial tax base while preserving its sense of small-town community. To achieve this, Holladay redeveloped its historic but aging downtown area and replaced a strip mall with Holladay Village Square, a 42,000-square-foot mixed commercial center that fronts onto the city-owned Village Plaza.

The Holladay Village features pedestrian-oriented, ground-floor retail and restaurants and offices on the upper levels. It also includes key community amenities such as a grocery store, a plaza, and a food truck court. Parking is offered on the street and in an underground structure behind the buildings. Holladay Village illustrates the positive impacts that can occur from carefully planning redevelopment of underutilized urban space.



*Prior to redevelopment, Holladay Boulevard primarily served as a thoroughfare for traffic and was lined by aging and inefficient strip commercial uses. Holladay City rerouted and shifted a road to front the new plaza, widened sidewalks, buried power lines, and installed bike lanes. Strong architectural design standards were developed to bring a sense of character to the area.*



## PLANNING FOR EVOLUTION IN NEW DEVELOPMENT

Planning for evolution over time is critical for two reasons. First, building a quality center can take many years. Constructing a large project all at once is costly and may not be in-line with market demand. Instead, it may be necessary to develop portions of the master plan over a long period. Achieving a vision can require future additions or repurposing space over time.

Second, the future is impossible to predict. Changes like online shopping, ride-share services, electric bikes and scooters, and telecommuting were not even considerations in land-use and transportation planning a couple of decades ago. Communities should establish and maintain a clear vision for the future but allow for flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.



*Utah State Capitol in 1936 (left) and today (right). The open space surrounding the capitol building has served several purposes over the last century. This land allowed for significant development of the complex as the state grew.*



Here are some example strategies to increase flexibility:



### FORM-BASED CODE

Use principle-based ordinance wording and form-based code rather than use-based regulations.



### STREET GRID

Build a connected street grid to support a variety of development types and intensities over time.



### INTEGRATED DESIGN

Design standards can help a center look and feel integrated into the community, regardless of use.



### FLEXIBLE FIRST FLOORS

Ground floors that can be repurposed from housing to commercial space can adapt to changing economic realities.



### TRANSITION ZONES

Create a transition zone between the center and residential areas that could be integrated into the center in the future.



### MULTIUSE PARCELS

Ensure the shape and size of each subdivided parcel will allow the space to be used for other purposes in the future.

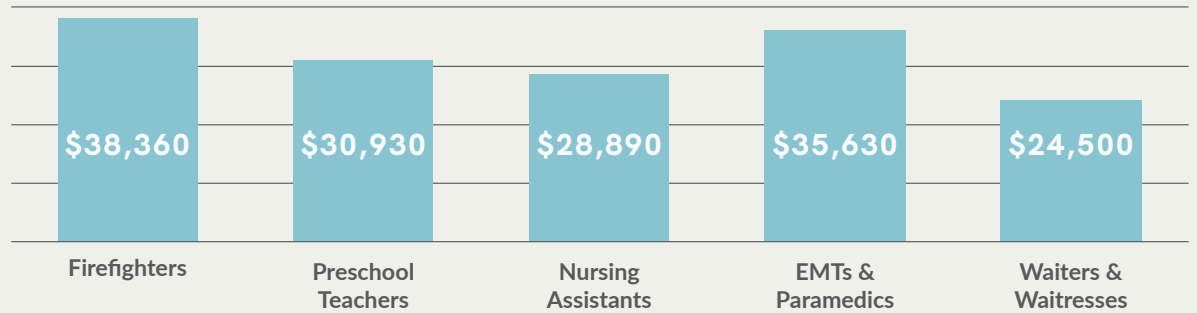


# AFFORDABILITY

## AFFORDABLE-HOUSING GUIDES

[The Affordable Housing Strategies guide](#) by the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah documents over two dozen affordable-housing tools utilized nationally and by ten Utah cities. The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute has also released [an analysis](#) of the five best practices for meeting Utah’s housing-affordability needs.

2020 Essential Workers’ Average Annual Income



*Telling stories about the people who live in affordable housing can help dispel stigma. A variety of housing options helps many essential workers live in the communities they serve.<sup>9</sup>*

Residential- and commercial-space affordability is a challenge in many centers. While higher-density development has the opportunity to save money by using less land and infrastructure, new construction is typically unaffordable for low-income residents or small businesses. In addition, attractive centers are in high demand because they are in short supply and enjoy strategic locations, both of which further drive up rent costs. While high property values in centers boost the tax base, a lack of affordable units can prevent centers from being inclusive and welcoming places that benefit the entire community.

Centers present an opportunity to weave affordable, higher-density housing more naturally into key locations that add amenities and other benefits to the neighborhood. To achieve this goal, affordable housing needs to be part of the conversation from the very beginning; municipalities and all stakeholders must be committed to its implementation.

Further, the team must be clear on what demographics and incomes to provide for (fixed-income households, young families, workforce housing, etc.) because different groups have different needs.



Funding options like tax credits, grants, tax-increment financing, and low-interest loans can help bring these projects to life. Long-term affordability is often a challenge when relying on grants or loans. Support partners like the Utah Housing Corporation specialize in guiding developers who are applying for funding. Others, like housing authorities, can help manage administrative work.

Mixed-income housing strategies can help keep the project economically viable, decrease community opposition, ensure that units remain affordable long-term, and reduce the stigma associated with affordable housing. In addition, showing positive examples of well-designed multifamily buildings may help to alleviate concerns. Good property management is very important for making sure those in need can get into affordable units and that the property is well taken care of.

## STATE OF UTAH AFFORDABLE HOUSING REPORT

There are many organizations across Utah that provide information on affordable housing.

For more data on the current state of affordable housing, [see the State of Utah Affordable Housing Report](#) from the Department of Workforce Services Housing & Community Development. This report, completed in 2019, provides detailed data and analysis on the current affordable-housing inventory and demand throughout the state.



700 E 400 S, SALT LAKE CITY



## MESSAGING

There are many misconceptions surrounding mixed-use and high-density development. These concerns mostly revolve around the kind of place the center will become and how it will impact the lives of nearby residents. Some of the most common myths are related to the following ideas:



### NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY

Residents often fear that higher-density development will lead to a decline in the quality of the neighborhood and decrease property values. They fear the area will become an unattractive place to live. In reality, centers often become high-value places. Many of the center case studies in chapter 6 highlight attractive areas where property values are increasing.



### CRIME

Another common fear is that high-density development may increase crime—a fear that is often rooted in stereotypes of the “type” of person that lives in multifamily housing. When controlled for other variables, there is no clear link between housing density and crime rates. In fact, centers can deter crime by increasing pedestrian activity throughout the day, which provides more visibility in public spaces.



### TRAFFIC AND CROWDING

Adding residents and visitors to the neighborhood raises concerns about traffic and crowding. Centers actually decrease regional traffic because people have safe, affordable, and convenient transportation options other than driving. Further, adding amenities to the community reduces the pressure of the growing population on existing services.

For more help understanding common myths about density and its true impact on communities, [check out the Higher-Density Development Myth and Fact document from the Urban Land Institute.](#)



Below are some general messaging principles that have proven effective, but they should be tailored to a local community's circumstances and needs.



## ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Public support and buy-in will most likely be achieved when the public is fully engaged and heard during the planning process. Engagement strategies should be values- and evidence-based and inclusive, and they should have support from local leaders and trusted community members.

For more information, [click here for the Wasatch Choice Public Engagement Guidebook.](#)

## SPEAK TO AUDIENCE VALUES

Values studies are a useful tool for developing focused messaging. New development can often lead to fear of change or the unknown, so it's critical to demonstrate that centers are the kind of places Utahns want to live in—safe, neighborly, and beautiful. [Click here to see a collection of Envision Utah values studies.](#)

## PURSUE PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is an important part of crafting and communicating your vision for the space. Sharing renderings and plans can help begin dialogue with the public and other stakeholders.

## ADDRESS MYTHS

Many fears and a great deal of confusion often surround new development in existing neighborhoods. It is important to identify and dispel myths directly. Use data and local well-known examples to reconcile facts and feelings.

## EMPHASIZE GROWTH REALITIES

It is important to ensure residents are aware of Utah's rapidly growing population and the value of centers as a strategy to maintain a high quality of life.

## CONVEY FISCAL BENEFITS

Historically, tax revenue generated by single-family development does not offset the long-term costs of the infrastructure to support it. Centers can stimulate increased revenue in declining malls and shopping centers.



# CHAPTER SIX: SCALES AND EXAMPLES

## WHY A VARIETY OF CENTERS IS IMPORTANT

To be most effective, centers need to be close to where people live. If there are only large centers that are too far apart, traveling becomes inconvenient and people must drive long distances to reach destinations. On the other hand, a pattern of only small centers that are close to one another would preclude many businesses or services that need larger catchment areas. The regional goal is to develop centers of various scales that are as close together as the market will permit but that are also widely distributed throughout the region.







*An appropriate pattern of centers ensures that each is scaled to the surrounding area. Although very different in scale, downtown Ogden and downtown Moab are both successful centers that meet the needs of their local communities.*





# WASATCH CHOICE CLASSIFICATION OF CENTERS

The Wasatch Front Regional Council utilizes the following quantitative descriptions to classify centers by size.

	<b>CATCHMENT</b> <i>(Population estimated to regularly use services and amenities)</i>	<b>FLOOR AREA RATIO</b> <i>(Comparison of building floor area to lot size)</i>	<b>HOUSING DENSITY</b> <i>(Housing units per acre)</i>	<b>BUILDING HEIGHT</b> <i>(In stories)</i>	<b>TYPICAL LAND USES</b>
 <b>NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>0.35 TO 1.0</b>	<b>6 TO 25</b>	<b>1 TO 3</b>	<b>RETAIL/CIVIC</b>
 <b>CITY CENTER</b>	<b>25,000</b>	<b>0.5 TO 1.5</b>	<b>10 TO 50</b>	<b>2 TO 5</b>	<b>GROCERY/ RESTAURANT</b>
 <b>URBAN CENTER</b>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>0.75 TO 4.0</b>	<b>20 TO 100</b>	<b>4 TO 10</b>	<b>COMMERCE/ REGIONAL RETAIL</b>
 <b>METROPOLITAN CENTER</b>	<b>ENTIRE AREA</b>	<b>1.0+</b>	<b>40+</b>	<b>4 TO 25</b>	<b>UNIQUE DESTINATIONS</b>



## CENTER CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented in this chapter are examples of different scales of centers located within Utah. None of these case studies embody every element outlined in this guide, and there is no such thing as a perfect center. Every center should be imagined and designed at the local level with a specific community in mind. These examples are great references that can help a local community model its own center and determine what it would take to make it happen.

### NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

#### SoDa Row

SoDa Row was the first neighborhood center within the mixed-use community Daybreak, located in South Jordan. SoDa Row is walkable, with local amenities such as a salon and ice cream shop, green space, office space, and an artificial lake. The center also includes public seating and event space.

Streets are designed for walking and biking, as is the community-wide trail network. Sidewalks are wide, and parking is located on the street or behind the buildings. Daybreak Parkway, a major four-lane arterial, splits into two one-way roads to improve the pedestrian atmosphere. The surrounding areas offer a variety of housing types, each with its own architectural styles.

SoDa Row is part of a larger master plan for the Daybreak community. Each village has its own neighborhood center, which creates a network of amenities throughout the development within walking distance of most residences. A city center is under construction at the center of the development, which will be served by TRAX and the Mountain View Corridor freeway.



## 15th and 15th

Since the 1940s, 15th and 15th has been a local business hub for the surrounding neighborhoods. The entire center is less than one block—located between Emerson Avenue and Kensington Avenue on 1500 East in Salt Lake City.

Today, this block contains various local eateries, a bookstore, and an art gallery. The shops on 15th and 15th are primarily locally owned businesses, which adds to the tight-knit feeling of community. The center arose and morphed organically over many years as the surrounding community grew. Some shops are located in converted houses, which helps the commercial buildings blend into the fabric of the surrounding brick-bungalow neighborhood.

Many visitors access the center by walking or biking from their homes in nearby neighborhoods. A bus line also passes through 15th and 15th, providing public transportation access. Parking is primarily on the street or behind or beside the buildings, which further enhances the pedestrian experience.



## Liberty Park

Liberty Park, located around 500 East and 900 South in Salt Lake City, serves as an organic neighborhood center. The park has provided a green gathering space for Salt Lake residents since 1881 and has remained a key attraction to this day. Liberty Park comprises 80 acres and includes opportunities for recreation such as running, biking, and swimming, as well as educational destinations like the Tracy Aviary and Chase Home Museum. In the summer, the park hosts a weekly farmer's market, cultural festivals, and city events. The park is accessible via bus and has a station from the citywide bikeshare, GREENbike.

Development of the neighborhood center surrounding Liberty Park occurred naturally over time as community needs changed. The Liberty Park neighborhood center offers a variety of housing options from historic single-family homes to midrise apartments. Romney Plaza is directly adjacent to the park and provides affordable housing for seniors. Additionally, there are many shops and restaurants all within a walkable distance of the park to support visitors and neighbors. The Liberty Park center is a great reminder that recreation, civic, educational, healthcare, and even religious uses can, all together, serve as an "anchor" for a center.



## CITY CENTERS

### Logan Historic Downtown

Logan's downtown, located around Center Street and Highway 89 (Main Street), has served as a center since the city's establishment in 1859. In 2019, the city completed a revitalization project on Center Street. Logan City worked closely with the Historic Preservation Committee, the Downtown Business Alliance, residents, and neighboring property owners in the Center Street rebuild.

Main Street's status as a high-traffic state highway was a challenge for walkability, but Center Street utilizes angled on-street parking and outdoor dining to create a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. In addition, shared parking reservoirs are located behind buildings, which front onto the sidewalk. The Cache Valley Transit District (CVTD) bus lines service the downtown corridor and offer free fares for all riders.

Improvements from the 2019 rebuild included widening sidewalks, updating infrastructure, adding an archway, increasing street furniture, and adding a midblock pedestrian crossing. The buildings still reflect the historic character of the area and provide dining and shopping, along with access to the historic Logan Tabernacle.

The redevelopment helped create a new sense of place and added walkability to downtown Logan with the hope of sparking further reinvestment in the area that will bring in new business and residences.



## Downtown St. George

Downtown St. George—encompassing the area around Main Street and St. George Boulevard—is being revitalized. Like many Utah cities, St. George hosts historic buildings from the arrival of the Latter-day Saint pioneers who settled the area but has since incorporated modern amenities.

A unique feature of downtown St. George is Ancestor Square, a marketplace that includes shopping, dining, and art galleries. The local farmers market is hosted here, and gardens are woven throughout. The St. George Historic Preservation Commission has posted plaques at several of the historic buildings in Ancestor Square to teach visitors about local history. Nearby apartments ensure that people can live close to these amenities, and more apartments are being planned and constructed.

Farther south, Town Square Park has a splash pad and hosts public events, including summer movies on the Square. The park is also adjacent to a children’s museum and the public library, making it a great place for families. Main Street includes two roundabouts and on-street parking, which help slow traffic to improve the pedestrian experience. The center is also served by SunTran bus lines.





## URBAN CENTERS

### Downtown Provo

Downtown Provo organically developed from a historic main street into an urban center. Located on Center Street and stretching from roughly 500 West to 200 East, downtown Provo weaves together historic infrastructure and modern amenities, including many buildings that have been present since the establishment of the city in 1852.

Downtown Provo is home to a variety of small, locally owned businesses and hosts many markets and festivals. Civic places, such as government centers, green space, and the repurposed Provo City Center Temple, help provide key services to the community. Provo has also seen modern developments in the downtown area, such as the Utah Valley Convention Center.

Today, Provo City utilizes a master plan for the downtown area to guide its preservation, economic growth, and mixed-use development. The master plan has helped spark revitalization, in part by adding housing, and the downtown is now thriving as it continues to grow. There are excellent connections to public transportation—particularly commuter rail and bus rapid transit—and the center has a very pedestrian-oriented environment, with on-street parking, outdoor dining areas, slow vehicle speeds, a connected street network, and building fronts that face the street. Downtown Provo highlights how historic and modern influences can blend to create a thriving urban center.



## Fairbourne Station and Valley Fair Mall

Fairbourne Station is a growing transit-oriented urban center located in West Valley City between 3500 South and Lancer Way near 2700 West. The creation of Fairbourne Station was a collaborative, long-term process that began in 2004.

West Valley City, UTA, and several private entities partnered on this multiphased development. Construction began in 2011 with the Redevelopment Agency of West Valley City as the master developer.

The urban center includes city essentials such as city hall, a library, an upscale hotel, apartments, a public plaza, and high-capacity transportation networks including TRAX, bus rapid transit, and I-215.

Around the same time, Valley Fair Mall—which is adjacent to Fairbourne Station—was being reimagined. New owners and investments from West Valley City’s redevelopment agency gave Valley Fair Mall a new life.

At the mall, portions of the once-expansive parking lot were filled in with retail and restaurant space. A network of local streets connects these uses, featuring on-street parking to improve walkability. Outdoor portions of the mall were added, including shops, restaurants, a splash pad, and open space.







Photo Credit: University Place

## University Place

University Place is an urban center located at the corner of State Street and University Parkway in Orem. Built in the 1970s, the University Mall was car dependent, with large parking lots surrounding a traditional indoor mall. The departure of a major tenant became a catalyst for a “40-year rethink” of the property, which led to a \$500-million redevelopment beginning in the mid-2010s.

The owner’s team worked closely with Orem City to create a new zone that allowed the developer more flexibility to develop the concept plan over time. University Place is now a walkable, mixed-use center served by the Utah Valley Express bus rapid transit (BRT) line. University Place offers three unique residential communities, outdoor green space, shopping, restaurants, entertainment, and Class A office space.

The redevelopment plan utilizes parking structures in strategic locations to replace surface parking lots to more efficiently park vehicles and free up land for more productive uses. The green space at University Place, known as “The Orchard,” offers hundreds of free community events year-round.

University Place will continue to develop several more phases over the years to further achieve a vibrant gathering place for the entire community.



Photo Credit: University Place



## METROPOLITAN CENTERS

### Downtown Salt Lake City

Downtown Salt Lake City is Utah's only current metropolitan center. In addition to being the state's largest employment center, downtown hosts many urban amenities and services including City Creek Center, the Salt Palace Convention Center, Vivint Smart Home Arena, Gallivan Plaza, Temple Square, the state capitol, multiple theaters, and the Salt Lake Public Library. These regional amenities serve the entire Wasatch Front and help to uniquely define Salt Lake City on a national scale.

Downtown Salt Lake City has continued to revitalize over time by adding thousands of housing units and improving the bike, pedestrian, and public transportation environment. This includes adding turnout lanes, protected bike lanes, midblock pedestrian crossings, and on-street parking. The area has the best public transportation access in the state with multiple TRAX and FrontRunner stations and many bus lines. UTA offers the free-fare zone in the heart of downtown, which incentivizes public transportation and increases foot traffic. Further, an excellent street grid has allowed the area to evolve and densify while mitigating congestion.

The capital city draws many visitors, residents, and businesses and serves as Utah's economic hub. It is the commerce, cultural, and entertainment center of the state.



## EMERGING CENTERS

Many communities in Utah, including those that are already or nearly built-out, are working towards developing centers that reflect the evolving needs of their residents. These communities recognize that as Utah continues to grow, establishing economic and cultural centers throughout population cores is key to preserving a high quality of life. Many of these projects are retrofits, demonstrating that the built environment can change to better serve residents' needs. See the following community plans for their upcoming centers:

- [Taylorsville Center Point](#)
- [Millcreek City Center](#)
- [Murray City Center District](#)
- [Sandy The Cairns District](#)
- [Downtown South Salt Lake](#)
- [Heber City Envision 2050](#)
- [Layton Forward](#)
- [Vineyard Town Center](#)



# THANK YOU!

Utah has been among the fastest-growing states—and sometimes *the* fastest growing—for decades. We grow because we have a prosperous economy and a high quality of life. Most of our growth is our own children and grandchildren, but others want to join us, many of whom already have family or other connections in Utah. As long as Utah is a great, prosperous place, the question isn't whether we'll grow but how we'll grow. As we've learned through numerous planning and visioning processes over the last 24 years, centers are essential for maintaining a high quality of life, a reasonable cost of living, and a robust economy.

Our work at Envision Utah has shown not only that centers are a robust strategy with many benefits, but also that there is vast public support and a strong desire for centers. In our two largest visioning efforts, the Quality Growth Strategy in the late 1990s and Your Utah, Your Future in 2015, the public overwhelmingly supported growth scenarios that provided more center-styled development with nearby amenities, shopping, and transportation options. The Creating Communities Guide is a resource for local governments, developers, and the public to build the shared future Utahns envision.

Thank you for reading! We hope you learned a bit more about the integral components of centers, how they can help bring vibrancy to your community, and how to implement them. Finally, we want to say thank you to our many funders, stakeholders, and working-group members who contributed their resources and expertise to this guide.

To learn more about the development of this document, contact us at [info@envisionutah.org](mailto:info@envisionutah.org).



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