

Benefits and Costs of Suburban Sprawl

Name: _____

Date: _____

As you listen to your teacher's description of the characteristics of suburban sprawl, take notes on the benefits and costs:

	Benefits (why it is good)	Costs (why it is a problem)
Low-density land use		
Single-use zoning		
Lack of diversity		
Other issues		

Suburban Sprawl: On the One Hand

Some people call the type of land use that we see in the counties around Chicago “suburban sprawl.” They use this phrase to describe the decentralization of development away from the city. They argue that this trend has negative effects:

- People live further from the places where they work than people in the city. This contributes to traffic congestion as people have to commute longer distances.
- Businesses are moving from the city to the suburbs. The typical commute is no longer from city to suburb, but from one suburb to another. This makes it more difficult to use public transit to get to work and creates traffic congestion that costs residents many hours of wasted time each year.
- Lower-density land use in suburbs means that governments have to provide infrastructure such as water and sewer lines in places far from existing development. This is expensive for taxpayers and less efficient than the higher density development in places like Chicago.
- Longer commutes by people in cars means that we are too dependent on oil. This is expensive, contributes to air pollution and means that we rely too much on foreign countries to meet our energy needs.
- Low-density suburban land use causes flooding of roads, homes and businesses by reducing the amount of land where rain water can soak into the ground.
- The desire to have a large, green lawn in the suburbs means that more fertilizer and weed-control chemicals run into lakes and rivers. This contributes to poor water quality and can have negative effects on fish and other aquatic life.
- Suburban shopping malls and “big box” stores drive smaller, independent stores out of business. This limits the choices consumers have and means that some people will lose their jobs.
- Driving instead of walking means that people get less exercise and become overweight, which can lead to health problems such as heart disease and diabetes.
- The conversion of farmland to suburban development drives up the cost of land and makes it difficult for families to continue farming.

Suburban Sprawl: On the One Hand (continued)

- Because homebuilders tend to build subdivisions with houses in the same price range, suburban development leads to communities that are segregated by income. Because school districts rely on the taxes on people's homes, there is an incentive for suburbs to try to attract the wealthiest people they can because their homes will be more expensive (and generate more money for the school district). Suburbs with large expensive houses have more money to spend on education than suburbs with less expensive houses. This contributes to inequality among communities, which is bad for the region as a whole.
- Suburban sprawl is fueled by federal and state tax policies such as subsidies for expressways and tax benefits for people who own their own homes. People who don't live or work in the suburbs are paying taxes to support suburban growth.

Suburban Sprawl: On the Other Hand

- People like the suburban lifestyle and enjoy having a large yard where they can relax and their children can play.
- People should be able to make choices about the type of community where they live. If suburban sprawl is so bad, why do so many people choose to live in suburbs?
- People believe that there is less crime in suburbs than in the city.
- The growth of the suburbs is a manifestation of the free market, reflecting people's freedom to act on their preferences.
- Some people don't want to live where there's a lot going on. They like the quiet atmosphere of a residential suburban neighborhood.
- Suburban shopping malls offer a safe, climate-controlled place to shop, particularly for mothers with young children and elderly people.
- Many suburban school districts have more money to spend than in the city, so people move to the suburbs because more money is spent per pupil and they believe that their children will receive a better education than students in places where there is less money for education.
- Some people want to live in communities where everyone is similar in race and income. This is more likely to be true in the suburbs than in the city.
- Sprawl is the result of economic expansion that has allowed a record number of Americans to buy homes for the first time. Sprawl is a reflection of upward mobility among people in the lower middle class.