

## Parcel Assembly

### *Summary and Benefits:*

Infill development is often difficult due to the presence of small, oddly-shaped parcels in older parts of cities and towns. Generally, to build sites that fit with the character of the neighborhood at densities that are economically feasible, developers assemble larger sites from smaller parcels. Parcel assembly can be problematic, however, as owners of the last parcel needed to assemble the whole site can exact significant financial concessions from developers in turn incentivizing all neighbors to be the last to sell. Jurisdictions have traditionally responded through the use of eminent domain, a highly unpopular and rarely invoked option.

Graduated density zoning provides jurisdictions with another tool to assemble larger sites from smaller parcels. Jurisdictions are able to keep lower-density zoning for sites less than a given size but allow higher density development on sites that exceed a certain “trigger” size. Owners are motivated to sell if the values of their assembled parcels at higher densities greatly exceed the current value of their parcel alone. All owners have to sell in order to achieve economic gains from their parcels as the density bonus is only triggered when the site reaches a certain minimum size. As a result there is an incentive to not be the last one to sell, as the last owner could be left with an oddly shaped parcel that would be difficult if not impossible to assemble into a larger site.

### *Potential Policies:*

Jurisdictions can choose to institute an “abrupt” or “sliding” scale of graduated density zoning or even downzone in certain instances:

- Abrupt: If an assembled site achieves a minimum size then higher densities are triggered.
- Sliding: A site’s density is increased with each subsequent increase in size up to a maximum density.
- Graduated density does not require upzoning. A neighborhood that is zoned at higher densities (i.e. 50 du/acre) but is holding out for higher prices could also be downzoned to allow the original density (50 du/acre) only on sites larger than a minimum size.

Table 1 Abrupt vs. Sliding Graduated Density Zoning :

*Taken from Donald Shoup “Graduated Density Zoning” Journal of Planning Education and Research*

	<b>Abrupt</b>		<b>Sliding</b>	
<b>Area (Acres)</b>	<b>Density (units/acre)</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Density (units/acre)</b>	<b>Units</b>
0.2	5	1	14	3
0.4	5	2	23	9
0.6	5	3	32	19
0.8	5	4	41	33

<b>1.0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
1.2	50	60	50	60

For either option the aim is to create a situation where the base density is much lower than developers want while offering a substantial density bonus for larger sites. The “abrupt” option creates a stronger incentive for the last owner to sell as the density bonus is not realized without the last parcel. By gradually increasing density, the “sliding” option creates stronger incentives for the initial owners to sell and puts less pressure on the owner of the last parcel.

***Model Ordinances/Useful Sources:***

- Shoup, Donald. "Graduated Density." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. (2008): n. page. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <<http://its.ucla.edu/shoup/graduateddensityzoning.pdf>>.
- City of San Bruno’s 2009 General Plan allows for higher FARs on lots bigger than 20,000 sq ft, see section 2-8 “Multi-use Residential Focus”:  
[http://www.sanbruno.ca.gov/comdev\\_images/planning/General%20Plan/Approved/SBGP\\_CompleteGP.pdf](http://www.sanbruno.ca.gov/comdev_images/planning/General%20Plan/Approved/SBGP_CompleteGP.pdf)
- City of Glendale provides a 25% density bonus in some neighborhoods:  
[http://www.ci.glendale.ca.us/gmc/Zoning\\_Code/Chapter30-36.pdf](http://www.ci.glendale.ca.us/gmc/Zoning_Code/Chapter30-36.pdf)
- Simi Valley provides a graduated density bonus in its Kadota Fig neighborhood on sites larger than 13 acres: <http://its.ucla.edu/shoup/graduateddensityzoning.pdf>