of a subdivision of expensive homes would not be threatened by the subsequent growth of neighboring industry. For this reason, U.S. developers were prominent in pushing for public regulation of land use and land subdivision. Developers and local governments also came to realize that there was a need to control the absolute amount of subdivision activity. During real estate booms, such as those of the 1900s and 1920s, a great many plans were registered. Far too many building lots, many of them with hard services, were put onto the market. This glut led to scattered development and inefficient service provision. The experience of the Great Depression, when construction virtually ceased and many serviced vacant lots grew weeds, underlined the need for this type of control. Between the wars, municipal and county governments introduced subdivision approval procedures that attempted to control not merely the form of new subdivisions but also their absolute number. To this day, however, such efforts have been hampered by the increasing fragmentation of government in most metropolitan areas.

Public and private agencies exert a variety of controls over land subdivision. Increasing efforts have been made to evaluate the environmental impact of proposed development. Although the number of regulations continues to grow, land use planning remains weaker in the United States than in Canada or in Europe where the rights of the land developer have less priority than does the public good. (SEE ALSO: Planned Unit Development; Residential Development; Subdivision Controls; Zoning)

—Richard Harris

Further Reading


Subdivision Controls

Subdivision controls are the regulations controlling partitioning of a larger parcel of land into two or more individual properties for the purpose of selling them to separate owners. The nature and restrictiveness of subdivision control in practice depends on how many lots are to be created and on the change in land use envisaged after subdivision. A minor subdivision typically involves no new streets and relatively few lots. Usually, it is subject to a much simpler set of subdivision controls and requirements. Subdivision control is practiced largely in the urban fringe, where it regulates the conversion of agricultural and woodland plots into suburban neighborhoods, industrial parks, and commercial areas. However, subdivision control can also be defined broadly to include the registration of condominiums, and these are found throughout the urban area.

In general, subdivision control takes the form of permit approval. In other words, a developer cannot subdivide a parcel of land without first gaining permission from a state or local authority. Proponents argue that subdivision control permits planners to ensure that (a) all lots are of an appropriate size and shape and have access to a public right of way; (b) road and other public utilities are adequately and efficiently developed; (c) sufficient land is set aside for appurtenant uses, including public open space; (d) attention is paid to floodplains, site contours, and environmental preservation; and (e) development will be compatible among neighboring land uses. In addition, subdivision control provides an opportunity for other affected parties in the community to make their views known about the impacts of the proposed subdivision.

Subdivision controls also generally provide for statutory dedications and exactions. Statutory dedications are transfers of land or an interest in land (e.g., an easement) to public ownership required by subdivision ordinances as a condition of subdivision approval. Exactions, also known as development charges, development impact fees, and lot levies, are cash contributions (or in-kind transfers) required of a developer as a condition of subdivision approval. Exactions can take many forms: for example, paying for construction of public roads and other infrastructure within the subdivision. Exactions can also include cash payments in lieu of statutory dedications. (SEE ALSO: Residential Development; Subdivisions; Zoning)

—John R. Miron

Further Reading


Subsidy Approaches and Programs

When governments in capitalist economies have chosen to intervene to alter private market allocations of housing during the 20th century, they have aimed at a number of targets and employed a number of strategies. These strategies and targets have not, at any given time, been the result of conscious rational selection among the full range of available alternatives, but, rather, the result of prevailing political and economic pressures filtered through the ideologies and perceptions of the political elites making the choices.