

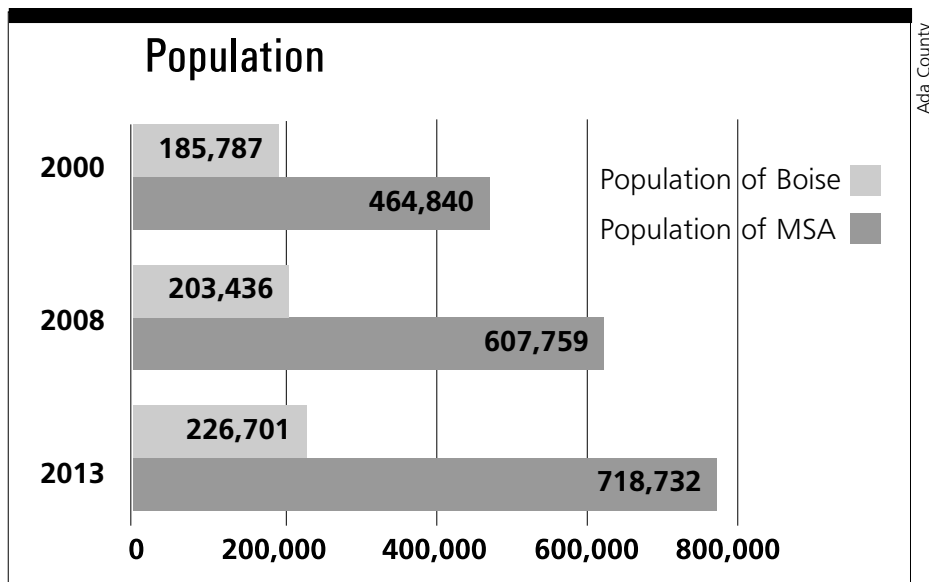
## Introduction

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**S**prawl meant easy living to postwar dreamers of suburban dreams in cul-de-sac subdivisions. It meant patios and lawns. It meant bad air and asthma. It meant towns segregated by income. It meant longer commutes and higher property taxes. Sprawl, to the historian Lewis Mumford, meant conformity and isolation. Sprawl, to the urbanist James Howard Kunstler, meant “the degrading of the public realm.”

Sprawl, whatever it was, caught Idahoans off guard. A 2001 *USA Today* ranking of America’s most sprawling mid-sized cities placed Boise at No. 3. In 2004, in a Smart Growth “sprawl index” ranking of the Pacific Northwest, the Boise-Nampa-Meridian Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) ranked No. 1. Less than one in ten Boiseans lived in neighborhoods dense enough for regular bus service. Only one neighborhood in Meridian and none in Eagle had more than 12 people per acre. In Ada and Canyon Counties, where the average per acre was five, the recent housing boom had aggressively paved the valley’s most arable farmland. Statewide, annually, the boom had consumed an expanse of land more than twice the size of Manhattan, enough farmland to grow 885 million pounds of potatoes or 52 million bushels of corn.

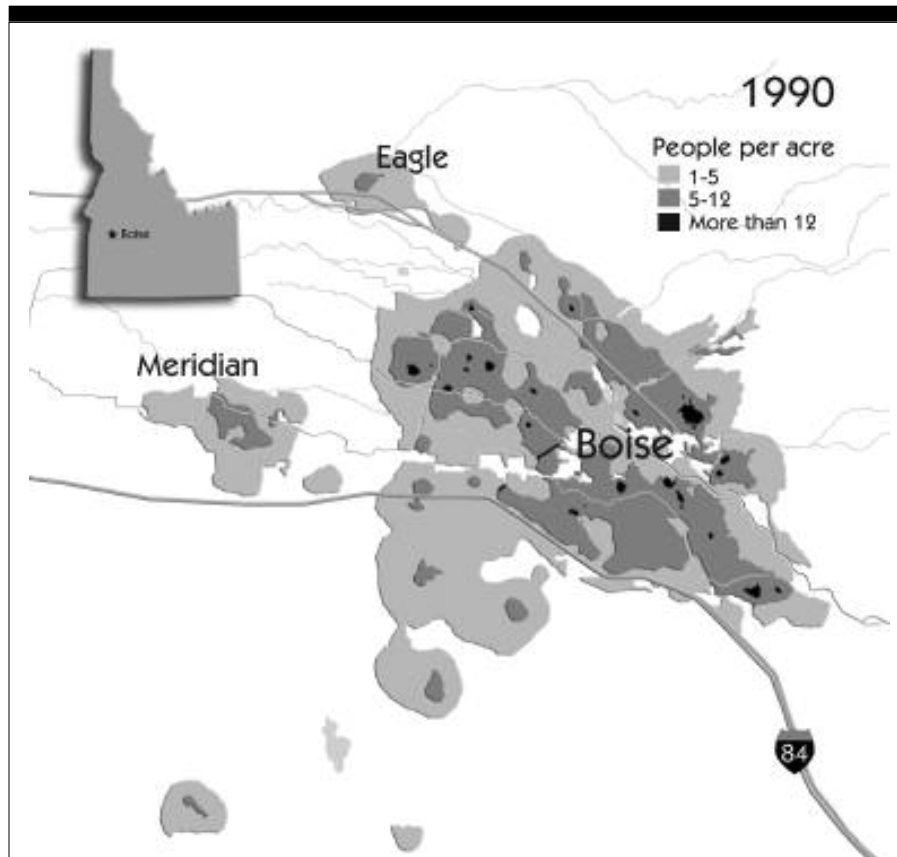
Stewards of the Boise Valley laid the blame at the foot of their cars. By 2007, in McMansions and Hubble Homes near big-box shopping centers, the average Boise household took 11 car trips each day. The Seattle-based Sightlines Institute published a study of the Boise Valley that linked car com-



Five counties in Southwest Idaho comprise the Boise-Meridian-Nampa Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Commonly called the Treasure Valley, the MSA stretches west from the Boise Foothills to the Oregon boundary line. The Boise Valley more narrowly refers to Ada and Canyon counties.

muting to obesity and diabetes. Air quality also suffered. Yellow ozone alerts in the dangerous summer of 2008 sent Boiseans coughing and wheezing. Toxic dust and soot called “particulate matter” was severe enough for the feds to threaten the county with “nonattainment,” black-mark designation that discouraged industrial growth. The City of Boise responded by calling for the power to tax for public transportation. The City of Nampa debated the merits of cutting employees back to four-day workweeks. Caldwell asked winter drivers to scrape icy windshields rather than wait for idling cars to melt off the ice.

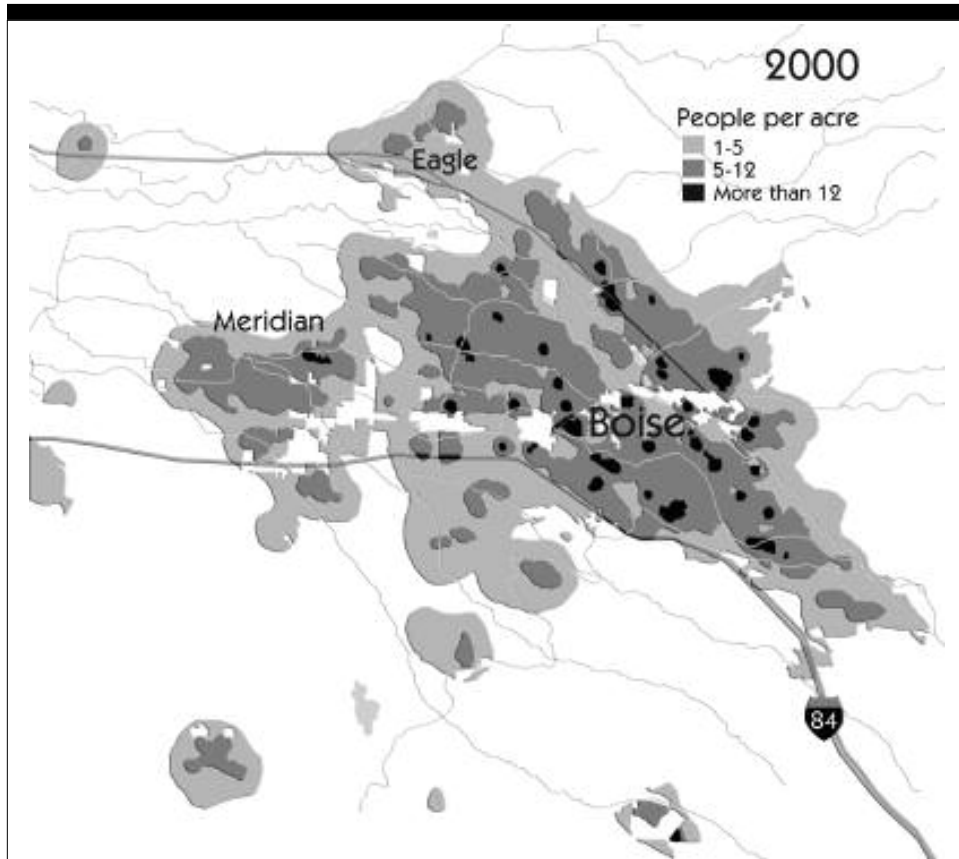
## 10 growing closer



Sightlines Institute, 2004

From 1990 to 2000, Ada County broke the Northwest record for low-density, car-dependent, energy-consumptive urban sprawl. By 2000 only 7 percent of county residents lived in so-called "compact" transit-friendly neighborhoods with 12 or more people per acre.

In the summer of 2010, in a classroom on Boise's Main Street, sprawl inspired a two-part class on settlement patterns. Forty-four college students from six academic departments wrote documented research papers. Star students returned in the fall to revise and expand their research. *Growing Closer*, herein, presents ten of those student essays. Two trace origins of sprawl. Others consider the politics of infill housing projects and suburbs spread thinly across Ada County by leapfrog development. A photo essay



Sightlines Institute, 2004

recalls sprawl's effect on Emmett's farms. Published by the Boise State University College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, the book is Volume Two in a student series about people and places transformed by metropolitan growth.

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