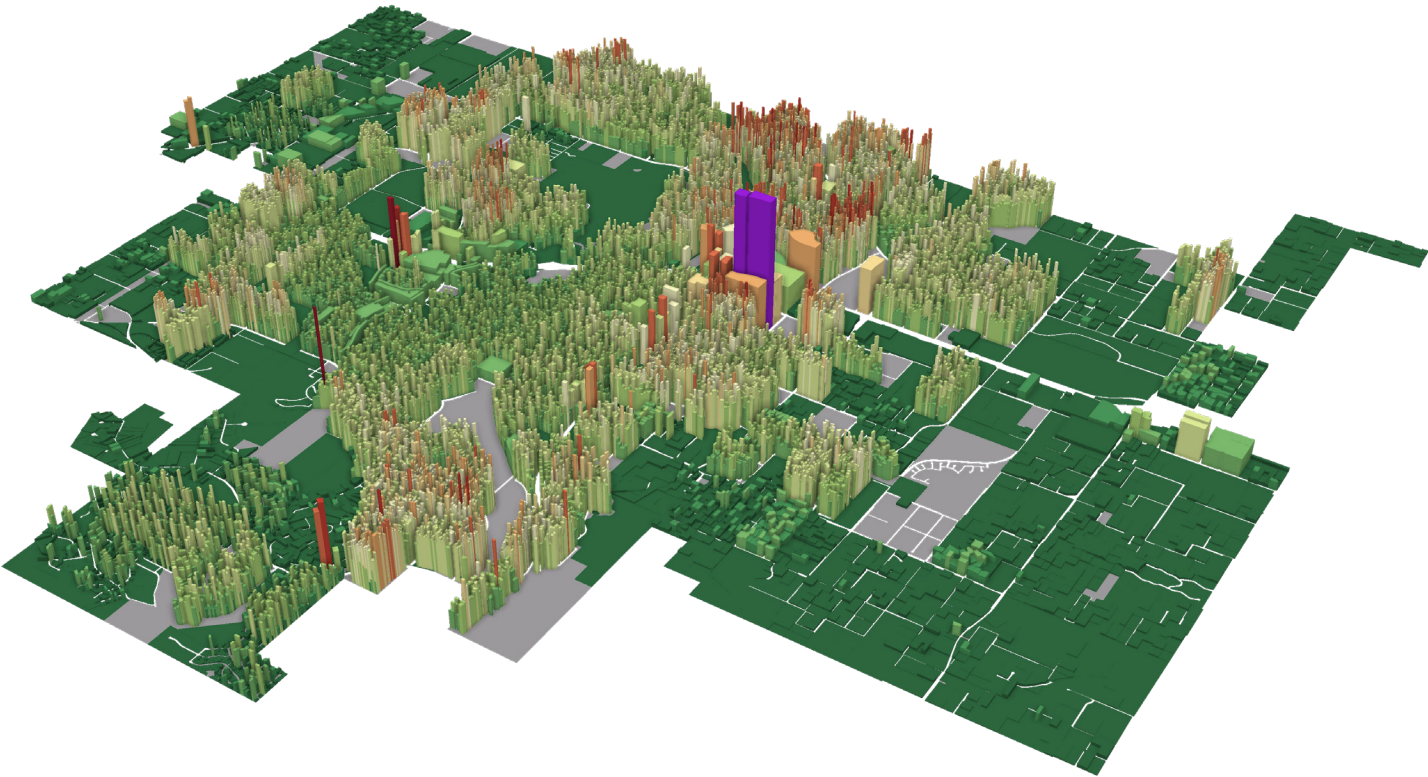


# Economics of Community Development

Menifee, California



# Glossary

## Assessed Value

The valuation of a real estate asset that determines the amount of property tax applicable to it.

## Community Facility District (CFD)

A workaround tool in CA. Boundary is drawn around a city creating a pocket city which pays for their infrastructure.

## Infill Development

The process of developing vacant or under-utilized parcels within existing urban areas that are already largely developed.<sup>1</sup>

## Land Uses

Regulating the use of land to achieve urban and regional planning goals; land uses include commercial, residential, industrial, agricultural, open space, recreational, etc.

## Lifecycle Cost

The whole range of maintenance, operations, and capital replacement that may happen multiple times over the full lifespan of a capital asset. These costs occur at different times but are eventual certainties..

## Medium Density Residential

Multi-unit housing that is consistent in scale and form to the single family detached building typology, but has fewer people per geographic area than high density residential.

## Missing Middle Housing

A range of house scale buildings with multiple units - compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes - located in a walkable neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

## Mixed Use Development

---

1 Source: [mrsc.org](http://mrsc.org)

2 Source: [missingmiddlehousing.com](http://missingmiddlehousing.com)

3 Source: [parking.net](http://parking.net)

A development that combines two or more land uses on one site. A classic mixed-use development type is a building with ground-floor retail spaces and apartments above.

## Multifamily Housing

A development that consists of multiple, separate dwelling units within the same single building structure.

## Parcel

Area of land that is owned (i.e. lot, plot).

## Parking Minimums

Also known as Minimum Parking Requirements (MPR), parking minimums are laws requiring new buildings to include a fixed number of off-street parking spaces based on an assumed demand for parking generated by the building's use.<sup>3</sup>

## Prop 13

An amendment of the Constitution of California enacted in 1978 that established base year values, a restricted rate of increase on assessments of no greater than 2% each year, and a limit of a 1% property tax rate of the assessed values.

## Return on Investment (ROI)

A measurement of financial performance that determines profitability by comparing an investments revenue with it's cost.

## Single Family Housing

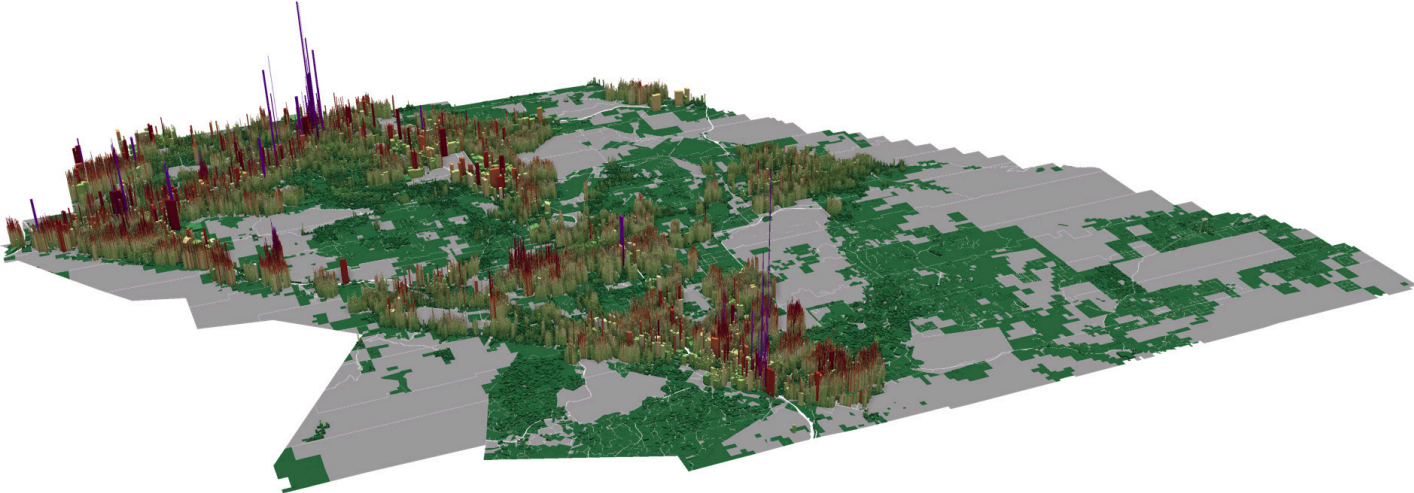
A residential development intended to house only one family at a time..

## Value Per Acre (VPA)

A metric used to evaluate the effectiveness of land use policy; property value divided by acres utilized.

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# History of Urban3 & the Rebirth of Asheville

Before Urban3 helped communities understand the true value of good design, there was Julian Price (Figure 1).

Julian moved to Asheville and saw the dilapidated state of the downtown against the backdrop of the stunning Blue Ridge Mountains and began to dream. In the early 1990s, Downtown Asheville, like many downtowns, faced an uncertain future after years of neglect and disinvestment. Its vacant storefronts and empty streets repelled visitors and locals alike, despite the beautiful scenery. The city had lost its soul.

Julian had inherited a family fortune and decided to invest his money into the people and places that, with a little help, could reinvigorate downtown. Despite cries of “that’s impossible” and “that’ll never work here,” Julian created the development company Public Interest Projects in 1990 and tapped Pat Whalen to take the lead. Mr. Whalen focused 75% of the \$15 million portfolio on fixing buildings, and the remaining 25% was invested in entrepreneurs as a revolving fund. The investments focused on catalytic projects with a focus on making downtown more liveable as a neighborhood. Julian wasn’t afraid to get down in the weeds—he picked up trash and fixed park benches, but he also had a crystal clear, big-picture vision. He knew that investing in restaurants, local media outlets, mixed-use buildings, and a self-help credit union would gradually create a self-sustaining ecosystem that would attract downtown residents, invite tourists, and help small businesses thrive. Together, these ingredients brought Downtown Asheville back to life (Figure 2).

Urban3 was created at Public Interest Projects to share the lessons of community revitalization and explain the importance of municipal economics to communities across the country.



Figure 1. Julian Price



Figure 2. A building in downtown Asheville before (left) and after (right) revitalization  
Source: [urbanthree.com](http://urbanthree.com)

# About the Author

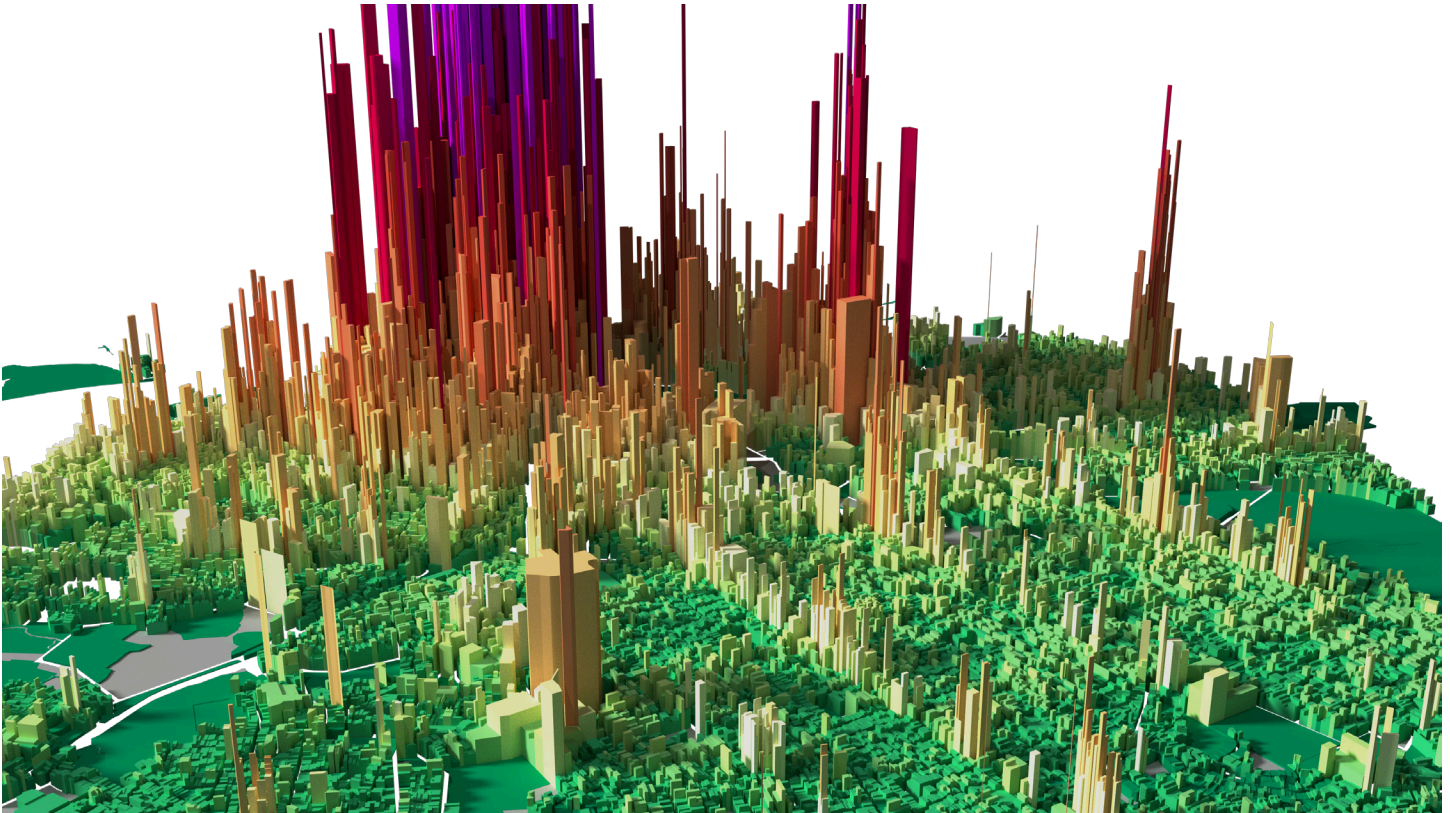


Figure 3. A per acre 3D visualization of Auckland, New Zealand; highest value parcels are in purple, lowest appear in green  
Source: Urban3

## URBAN3

We are a consulting firm specializing in land value economics, property tax analysis, and community design. Our approach bridges the gap between economic analysis, public policy, and urban design. Our work will empower your community with the ability to promote development patterns that both secure its fiscal condition and create a strong sense of place.

We provide communities with an in-depth understanding of their financial health and built environment by measuring data and visualizing the results (Figure 3).

# Introduction to Menifee

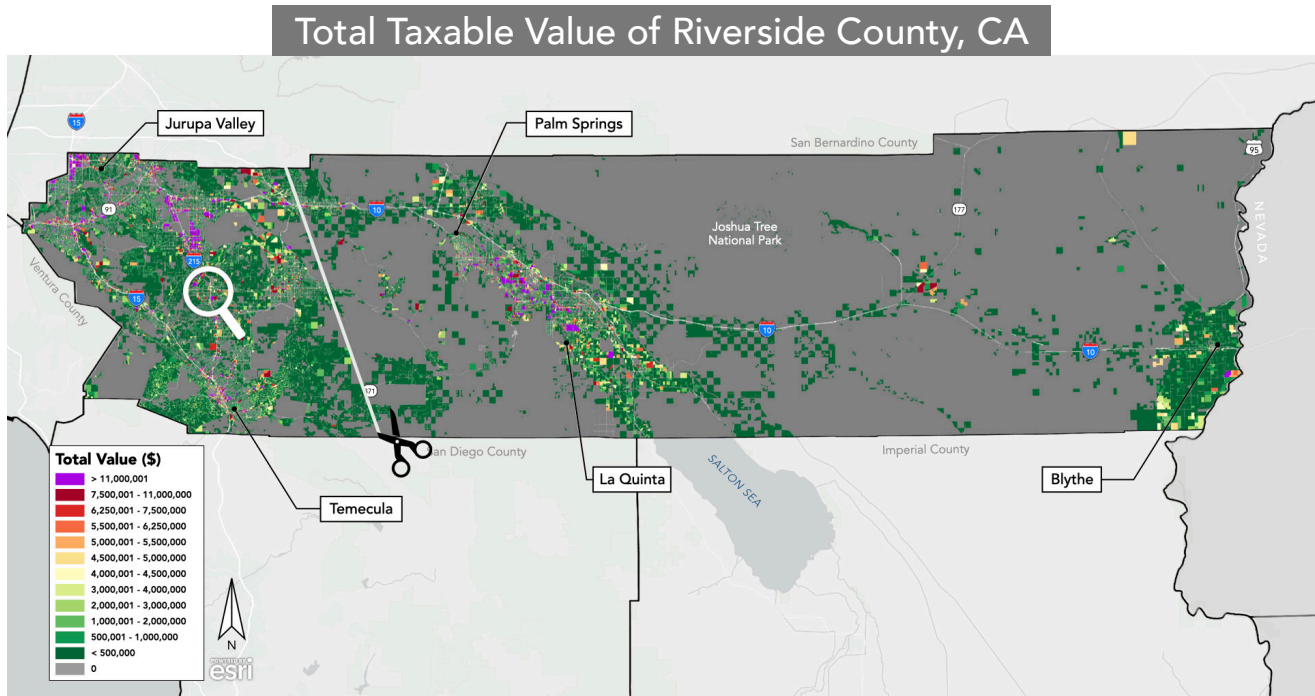


Figure 4.  
Source: Riverside County CA, FY 22-23

Menifee is one of Southern California’s youngest and fastest-growing cities—just 17 years young and making bold moves to form its own identity. While many communities in the Inland Empire remain shaped by decades-old plans, Menifee is embracing innovation, reinvention, and purposeful growth to meet the needs of its current and future residents.

Strategically located along the I-215 corridor in the heart of Southwest Riverside County, Menifee, and the region, faces a critical juncture of how to evolve. Currently, the city is a vibrant patchwork of previously independent developments, such as Sun City, Quail Valley, and Romoland, which were built well before Menifee was an incorporated city. Over the last couple decades many gated and walled subdivisions have been constructed with single family home residences. The task going forward is how Menifee will plan to cohesively meld these parts together while developing new regions of town.

With an eye toward smart growth, Menifee is planning for connected, thoughtfully designed districts, walkable trails, and dynamic people-oriented spaces. The city is investing in itself today—diversifying its revenue base, strengthening infrastructure, and cultivating the “third places” that bring people together. These efforts have not only safeguarded the physical culture of Menifee’s past but have also contributed to tourism, educational opportunities, and sustainable urban development. However, housing pressures and economic development remain key challenges to manage going forward.

The purpose of this report is to assist Menifee in analyzing and visualizing various aspects of the city’s economic systems as it relates to real estate. The analysis conducted for this project strategically defined the study area as the western portion of Riverside County. Focusing on this condensed area enabled more geographically relevant comparisons within the broader county-wide analysis (Figure 4). This report includes evaluations of revenue streams - particularly property, sales tax and service fees - using both 2D and 3D graphics to show the relative economic potency of different land uses. Through this comprehensive analysis, Menifee will gain insights into development patterns and their financial impacts, leading to better decision-making.

# Understanding Local Finances

## How California's Tax System Works

### wikiHow Your Taxes Work

California



$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{Taxable Value} & - & \text{Homeowners' \& Other Exemptions} & = & \text{Net Taxable Value} & \times & \text{Tax Rate} & = & \text{Tax Bill} \\
 & & \downarrow & & & & & & & \\
 & & \text{Prop13} & & & & & & & 
 \end{array}$$

Figure 5.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

To understand the fiscal health of a community, we must first understand the underlying tax structure of the area to uncover the relationship between land use decisions and revenue production. When public revenues vary geographically, we can draw comparisons to other spatially relevant facts, such as patterns of development, demographics, and public investment. Put simply, land use directly affects a parcel's tax productivity. As such, analyzing both the source of government revenues and the patterns from which they originate is critical to planning a strong financial future.

In the United States, tax systems vary by state and municipality. The state of California collects a substantial amount in personal income tax that is then distributed to counties. Urban3's 3D public revenue models only include sales, property taxes, and user fees because they compose 90% of the city's general fund and are geospatially relevant.

Like all cities in California, dealing with the budget limitations imposed by Proposition 13, enacted in 1978, underscores the need to both maximize existing property tax revenues and explore new sources—topics that will be addressed in the following sections. Figure 6 illustrates how Proposition 13 limits the annual increase in a homeowner's property tax bill (shown by the light blue bars), even as the property's market value rises each year (represented by the dark blue bars). The greater the annual increase in market value, the larger the effective tax discount the homeowner enjoys. However, once the property is sold, its taxable value is reset to reflect the current market value, and the cycle begins again.

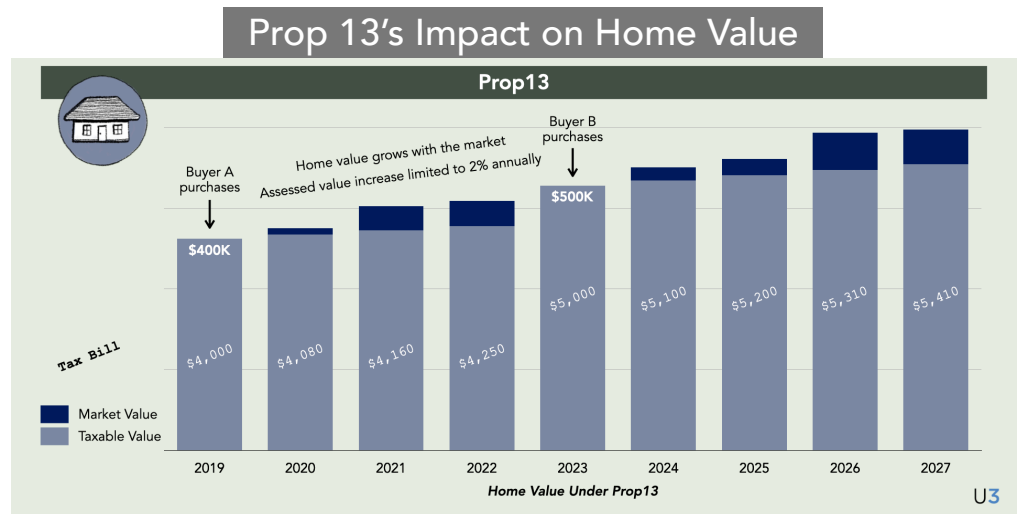
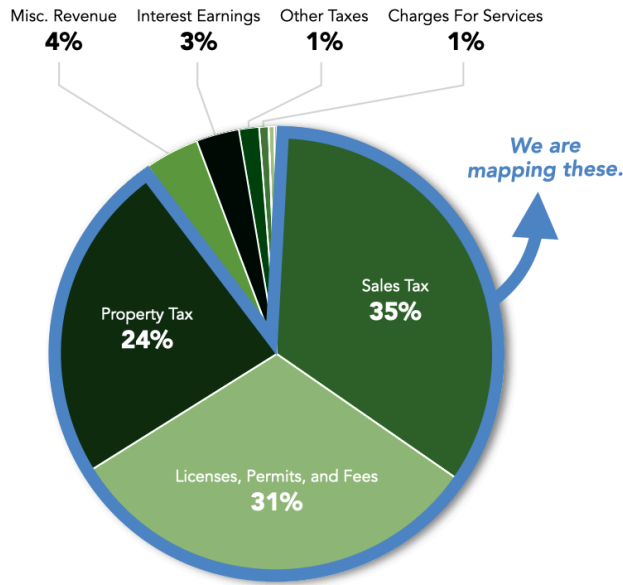


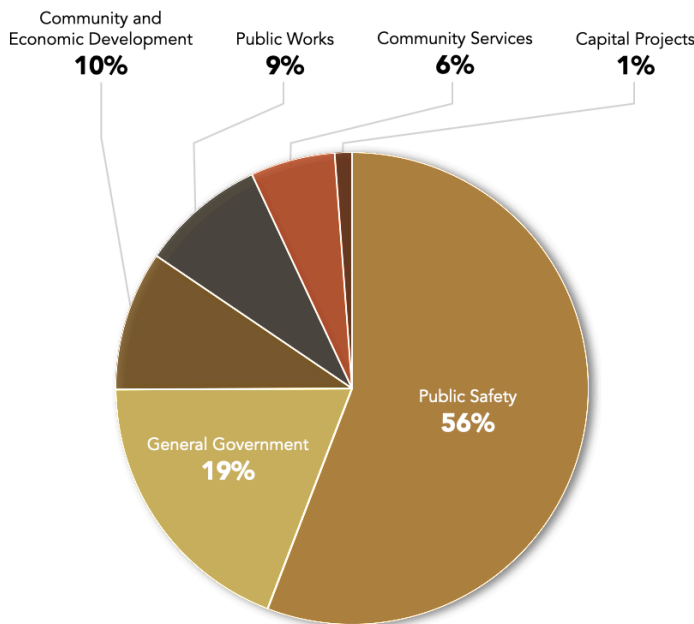
Figure 6.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

# Budget: General Fund Overview

## Revenue and Expenditures



**Revenues: \$99.9M**



**Expenditures: \$100.6M**

Figure 7.  
Source: Menifee, CA

The overall breakdown and flow of FY 2024 monies through various revenue sources into the General Fund and their subsequent allocation across different expense categories is illustrated in Figures 7 and 8.

The total revenues generated amounted to \$99.9 million, which was distributed across several categories.

Sales Tax constitutes the most significant source of revenue, accounting for 35% (\$35 million). And yet, according to city staff, the City has \$2.2 billion in unmet demand and sales tax leakage (an estimated \$15-18k per person or \$56k per household). This is equivalent to millions of dollars supporting other cities and not captures within Menifee to provide services to its residents. Property tax contributes 24% (\$24 million), while Licenses, Permits, and Fees made up 31% (\$31 million) of the overall revenue. The remaining 10% (\$10 million) consisted of all other sources of revenue. So while people often say, "I pay my property taxes..." their property taxes alone do not pay for Police (\$30 million per year) and Fire (\$20 million per year), Public Works (\$10 million per year), Parks (\$6 million per year). New homes in Menifee do not fully support the services they receive, and that is why capturing other revenue sources like Transient Occupancy Tax and sales tax is so critical, along with shopping local.

The total expenditures amounted to \$100.6 million. Public Safety (Police & Fire) received the largest allocation of 56% (\$56 million), followed by General Government Expenditures at 19% (\$19 million). Community and Economic Development was allocated 10% (\$10 million), Public Works was allocated 9% (\$9 million), New Capital Projects received 1% (\$1 million), and the remaining 6% (approximately \$6 million) goes to the rest of the departments.

Menifee's use of community facilities districts (CFDs, represented in Licenses, Permits, and Fees revenue) shows a smart offsetting of additional budget costs that arise from new development. This type of budgetary revenue-cost analysis will benefit the city as new developments come online, but still does not fully support the services provided to its residents.

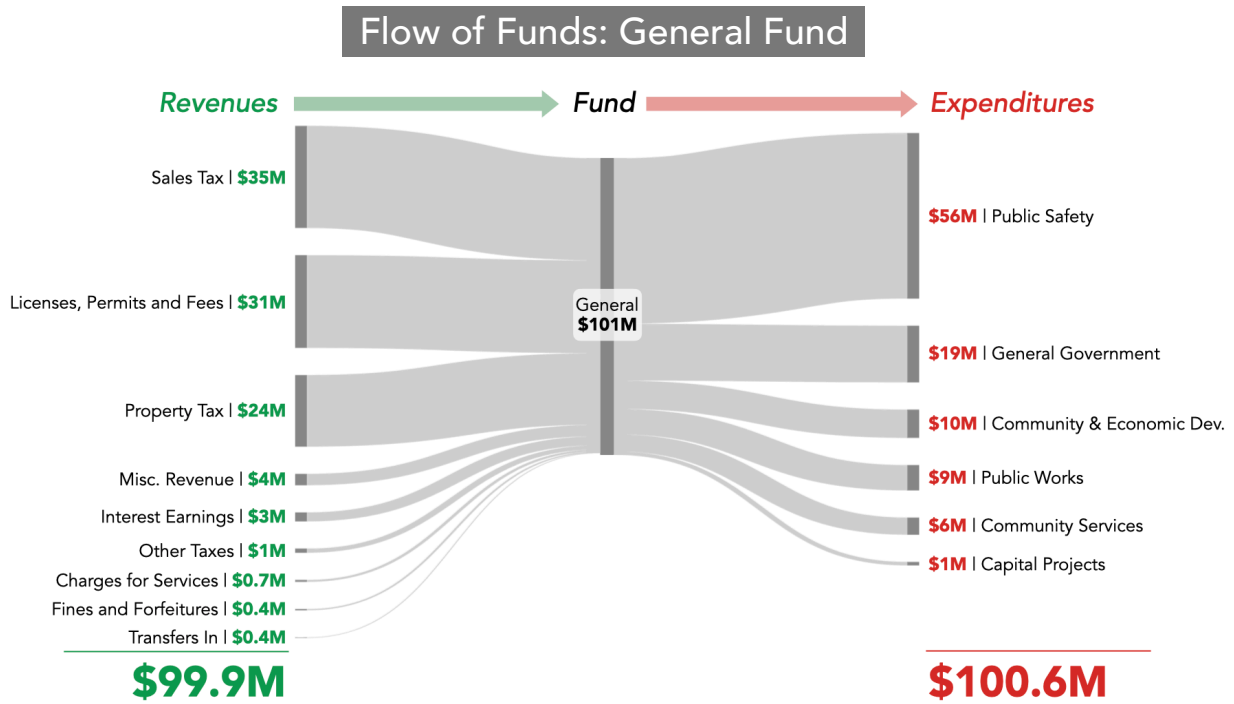


Figure 8.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

## Measuring Taxable Value

Measuring the financial efficiency of land has two major options. Using the total taxable value of a parcel is one way to analyze the overall value of a city's land (i.e. top sales tax generators), but when it comes to understanding economic productivity, it is not always the most useful. Instead, Urban3's analysis focuses on the value "per acre" metric as a unit of productivity. After all, cities and counties are, at their simplest, finite areas of land. How that land is used, developed, and designed has a direct effect on municipal budgets. The per acre metric normalizes total revenues and tax values, creating direct "apples-to-apples" comparisons utilizing land consumed as a unit of productivity.

Using Value Per Acre (VPA) to compare properties is like using miles per gallon (MPG) to compare cars. When comparing cars, the miles a car can go per tank isn't typically referenced because it only reflects the size of the tank, not how efficient the engine is. We apply the same principle to measure the financial productivity of various development types across a community. This normalization provides a balanced lens to compare the value productivity of different land use patterns and building typologies.

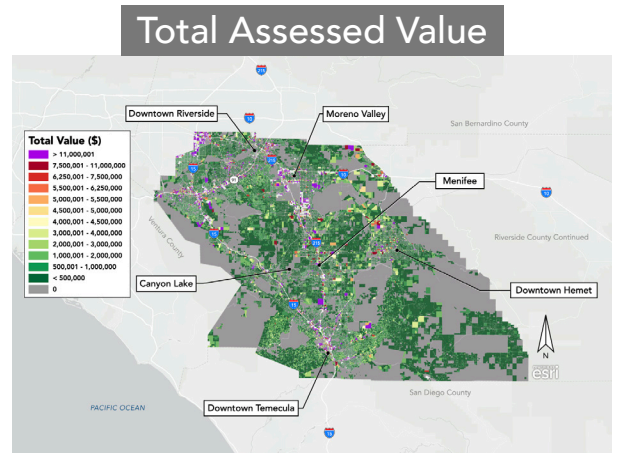


Figure 9.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

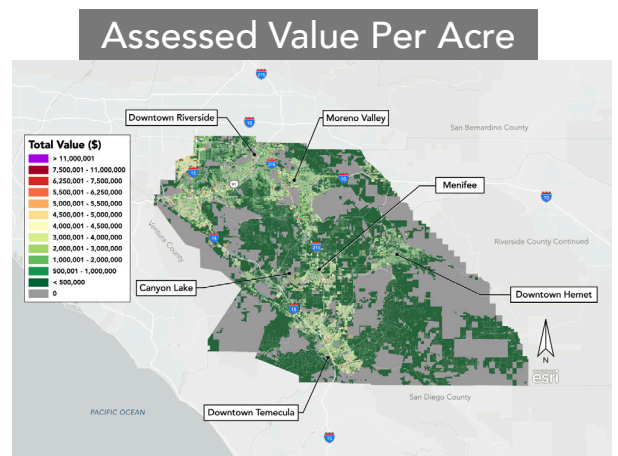


Figure 10.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

## 3D Value Per Acre for Menifee



Figure 11.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

with public utilities (streets, water, sewer) than denser development patterns. By a function of being more spread out, sprawling development requires longer stretches of infrastructure to service each unit.

Menifee's Value Per Acre model in Figure 11 shows that the most productive area of the city is the Artesa Town Center Apartments—valued at \$12 million per acre—while much of the city has similar, lower values per acre. This finding is consistent with our work in cities across the county.

Typically, higher values exist in areas with a wide variety of higher-density commercial, residential, and mixed uses. As seen in Temecula and Riverside (Figure 14), downtown values are pronounced, while other land use types are spread across the county, where light and dark greens mostly indicate single family housing and big box commercial stores.

These themes can be categorized in order to draw conclusions about specific land use decisions. In the Value Per Acre by Building Type chart in Figure 13, we can compare the performances of “low density”, “medium density”, and “high density” residential, commercial, and mixed-use properties. This reveals a clear correlation between higher density developments and economic potency. It is worth noting that Riverside County has a wide variety of highly potent multifamily residential buildings and mixed use developments which contribute significantly to its tax base.

## Building Type Comparison Rollup for Riverside County, CA



Figure 12.  
Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

The 2D maps in Figure 9 and 10 illustrate the difference between total taxable value and taxable Value Per Acre of parcels in Menifee. The larger purple spikes in the 3D taxable Value Per Acre model (Figure 11), make clear which properties yield high property tax value relative to parcel size. This relationship is important because, again, cities only have a finite amount of land and Menifee is land-locked by its surrounding cities and communities.

Only examining a development's total tax production overlooks the amount of land and other public resources consumed in order to produce revenue. Expansive developments with larger footprints such as a sprawling subdivision are typically more expensive to service

with public utilities (streets, water, sewer) than denser development patterns. By a function of being more spread out, sprawling development requires longer stretches of infrastructure to service each unit.

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Figure 13.  
Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

## 3D Assessed Value Per Acre

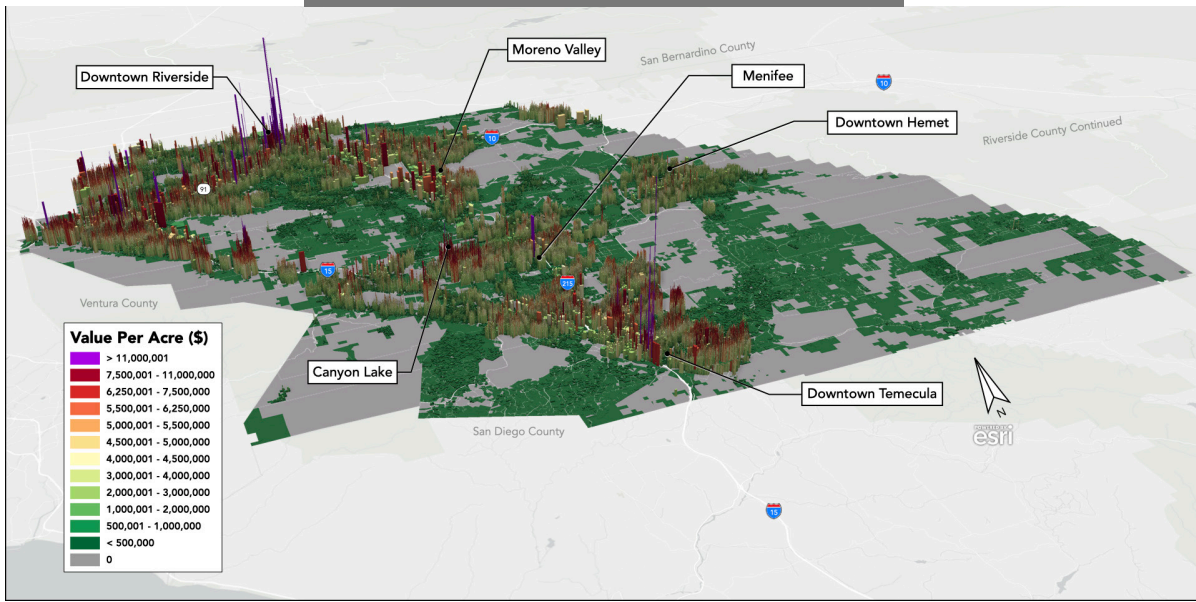


Figure 14.  
Source: Riverside County CA

## Productivity Ratio

How efficiently is Menifee utilizing its land? One metric Urban3 utilizes to express the economic potency of land is the “productivity ratio.” This figure is calculated by comparing the land area as it relates to total taxable land value between Riverside County and Menifee. As Figure 15 shows, Menifee’s productivity ratio is 1 to 1.6. Simply stated: Menifee’s taxable value is 1.6 times greater than the amount of County area it takes up. Essentially, Menifee’s economic potency is 60% higher than the county’s. Granted, Riverside County is quite large, with much of its land remaining undeveloped, so from this perspective, a potency ratio of 1.6 is insufficient.

## Productivity Ratio of Menifee, CA

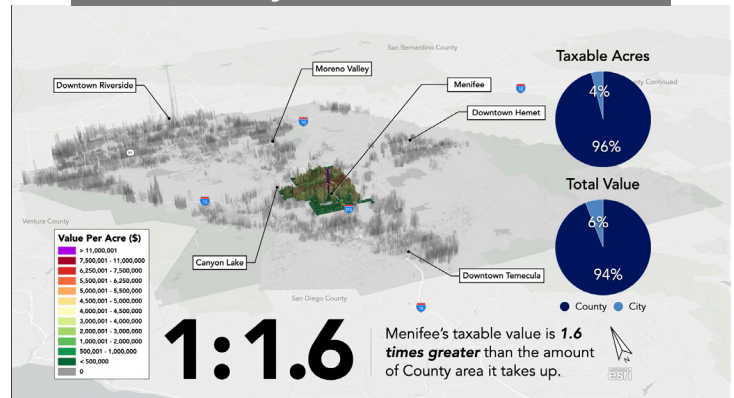


Figure 15.  
Source: Riverside County CA

## Productivity Ratio Projection Comparison

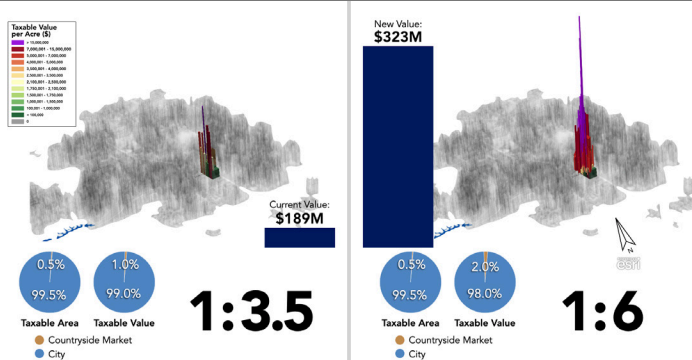


Figure 16.  
Source: Riverside County CA

Using this same metric of measurement, consider Menifee’s premier commercial corridor: Countryside Market. In comparison to Menifee as a whole, Countryside Market is 3.5 times as productive as the city area it takes up. Urban3 recommends aiming for a downtown—or in this case a commercial corridor—that is at least 6-10 times as productive as the city to maintain a healthy downtown that effectively supports the rest of the community. In this context, Countryside Market is underperforming in terms of economically maximizing land use. As a thought experiment, Figure 16 gives a rough estimate of the total value improvement if Countryside Market grew to a 1:6 productivity ratio.

# Taxable vs Exempt

Examining the tax landscape reveals that 55% of the land in Riverside County falls under taxable categories, while the remaining 45% is exempt from taxation (Figure 17). While if we zoom in, we can see that 84% of the land in Menifee is taxable, with only 16% of it's remaining land being exempt (Figure 18). These maps provide key insights for future development by highlighting areas with high potential for increasing tax revenue through new development. They also guide strategic planning for development that can have the most impact economically.

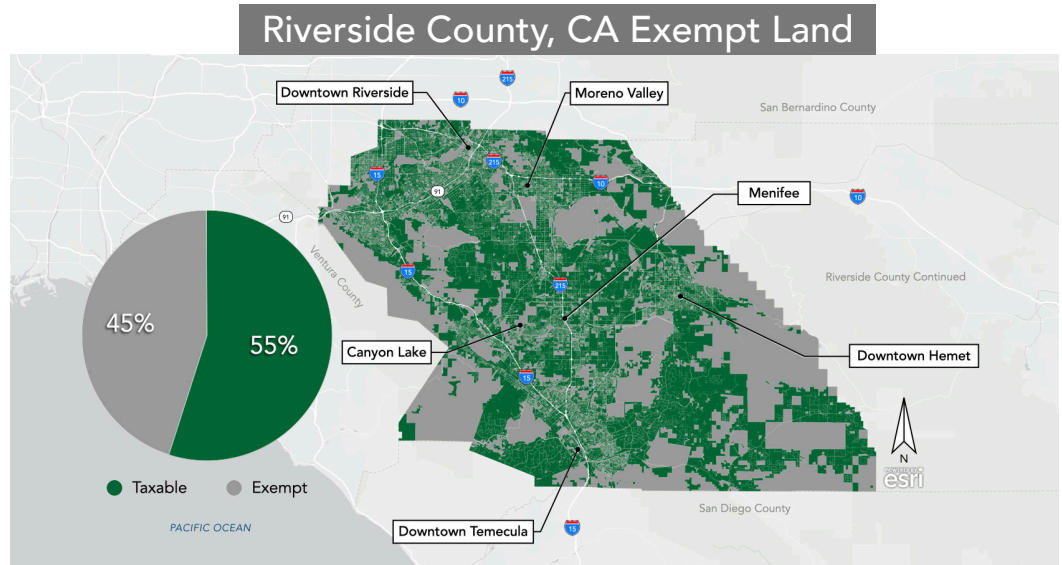


Figure 17.  
Source: Riverside County CA

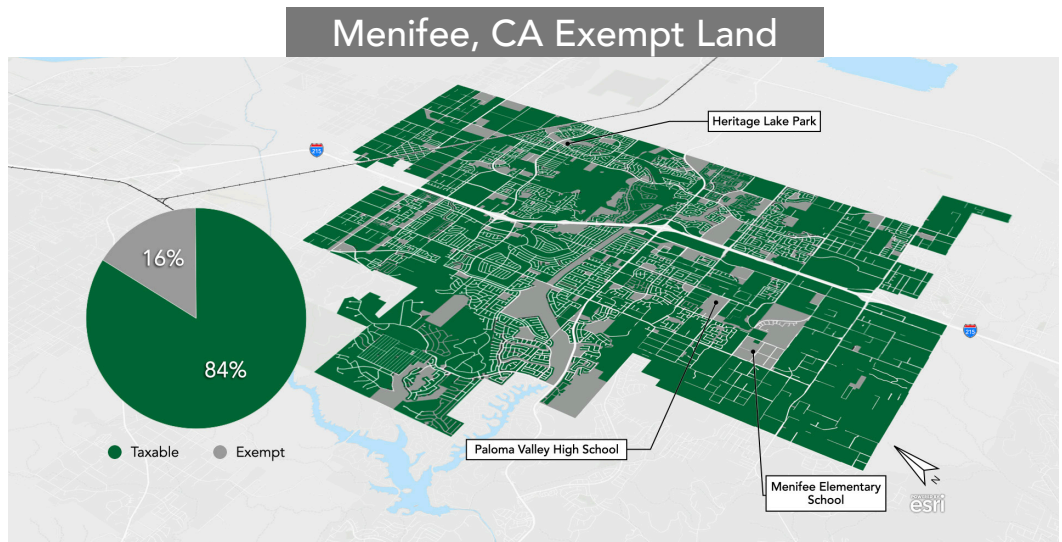


Figure 18.  
Source: Riverside County CA

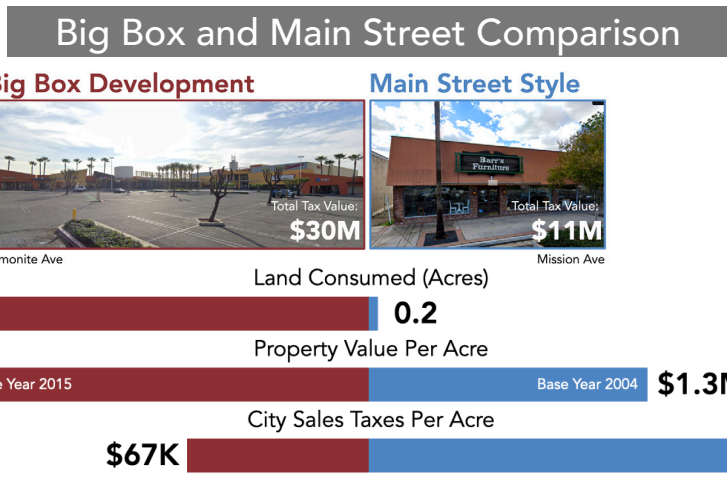


Figure 19.  
Source: Riverside County CA, FY 22-23, 2022, Redfin



# Lasting Value

The high productivity of Downtown areas in the county can be attributed, in part, to the significant number of historic buildings which have been integral to the area’s economic vitality for many years. These older structures follow a 100 year old style of construction—developed before the widespread use of automobiles—that position buildings at the front of the lot and foster a pedestrian-friendly, accessible streetscape. Figure 22 and 23 showcase particularly poignant examples of historic properties that still command high value in their downtowns. An important consideration for high productivity buildings from a past century: they are never lower density properties, as is often the case for development in Menifee. To ensure lasting value, allow local examples of long term success guide your decisions.

## Base Tax Year: Prop 13

One of the most significant factors influencing city budgets across California is Proposition 13. As shown in Figures 24 and 25, the year a property was last assessed for taxes is often a predominant indicator of its economic productivity, even in scenarios where only minor differences between properties exist. While this is a statewide issue that extends far beyond Menifee, there are still local strategies that can help. Expanding opportunities for property owners to improve their properties—such as adding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or supporting developer-led infill projects—can lead to more efficient land use. More importantly, in many cases, these improvements can also trigger a reassessment of the property’s base tax year, increasing local revenue.

## Sales Tax

While property taxes are an important source of revenue for Menifee, sales tax plays an outsized role in the municipal revenue, given the structure of the California tax system. However, similar to property tax productivity patterns, sales tax productivity is also dependent on how land is used. By understanding how different property development patterns influence sales tax productivity, Menifee decision-makers can make knowledgeable choices about what development patterns to encourage. Our analysis revealed that the greatest sources of sales tax revenue, unsurprisingly, were the commercial properties along Newport Rd.

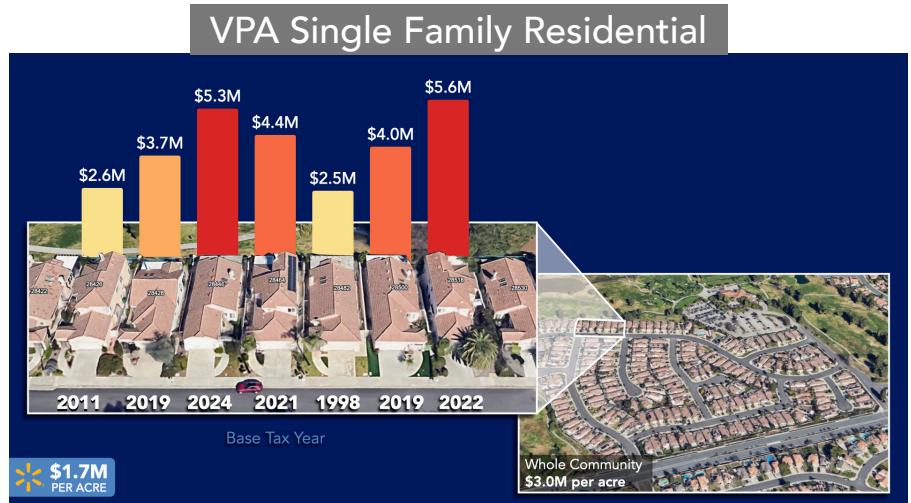


Figure 24. Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

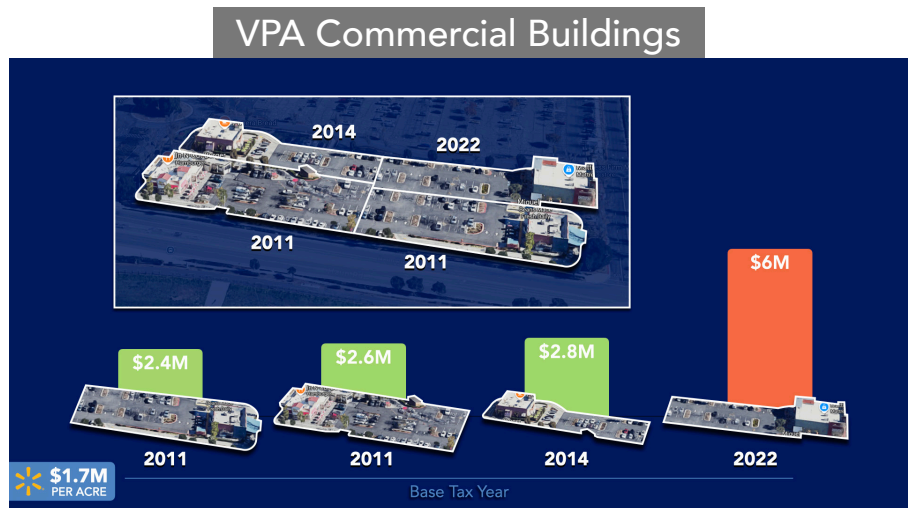


Figure 25. Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

CFDs (or Community Facility Districts) also play an important role in the delicate balance of new developments offsetting their new municipal costs. To get a better sense of how these revenue streams fiscally interact with land use patterns, Urban3 combined property (oranges) tax revenues, sales (blues) tax revenues, and CFD fees (greens) in the stacked model in Figure 26. These stacked values were aggregated to produce a total tax revenue per acre map, as seen in Figure 27, based on the three revenue sources. The highest earner of this metric is Menifee Towncenter which earned \$55,000 per acre in 2024.

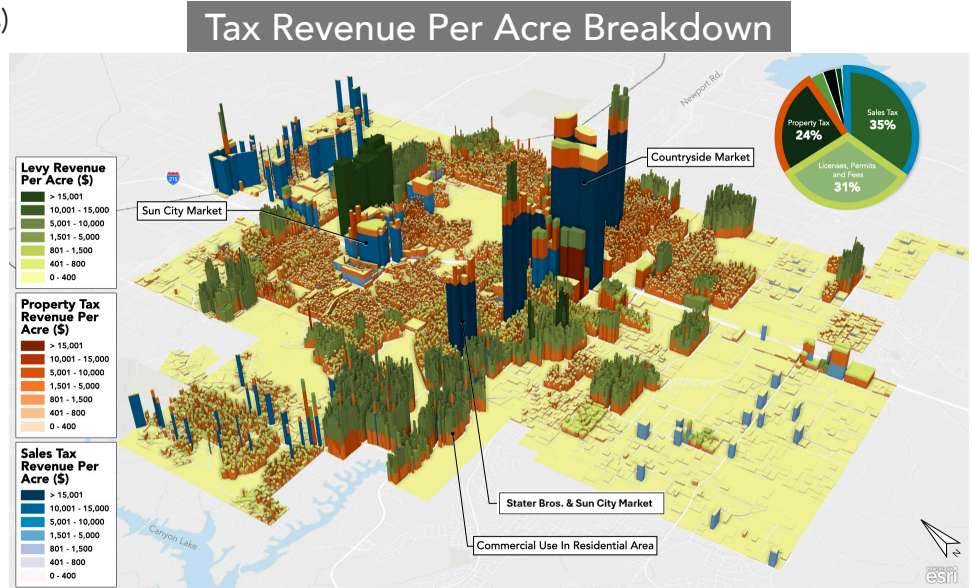


Figure 26. Source: Riverside County CA

While this figure is significant on its own, comparing it to our previous work in Redding, CA provides valuable context. Although Redding is a different city in many respects, the comparison remains relevant, as it operates under the same California tax system as Menifee. In Redding, our analysis showed that the Redding Shopping Center—a development comparable to Menifee Town Center—generated \$99,000 per acre in combined property and sales tax revenue during FY 2022. In contrast, Redding’s downtown produced \$288,000 per acre in the same period—nearly 3 times the value of the shopping center. We had to use Redding as an example as Menifee does not yet have a downtown to evaluate, but this pattern of shopping center vs. downtown productivity of revenue exists in most cities. Similar patterns in sales tax productivity have emerged in our broader work—previously noted in Jurupa Valley, CA—and are further illustrated in Figure 28 from our analysis in Durango, CO.

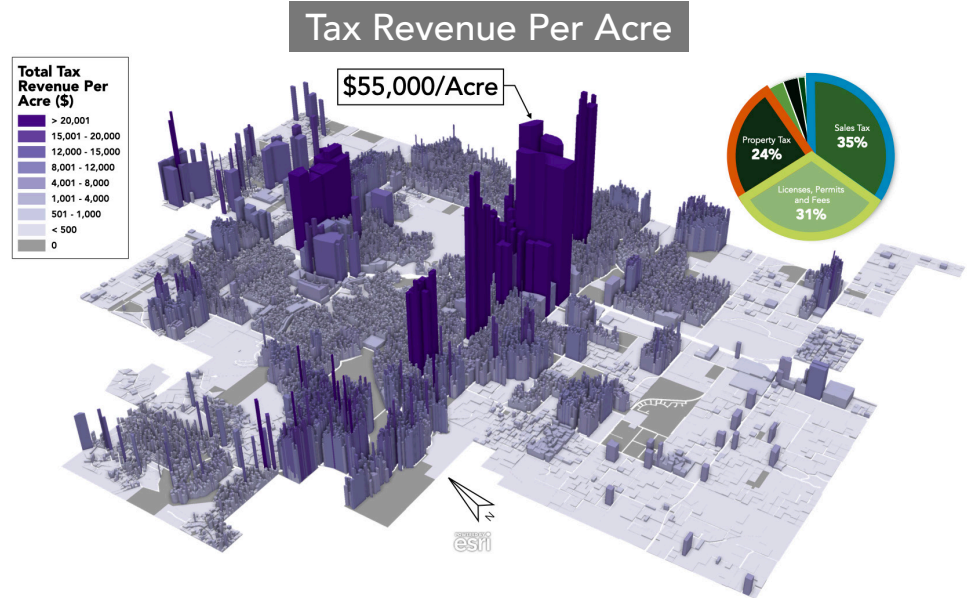


Figure 27. Source: Riverside County CA

### Comparing Financial Productivity

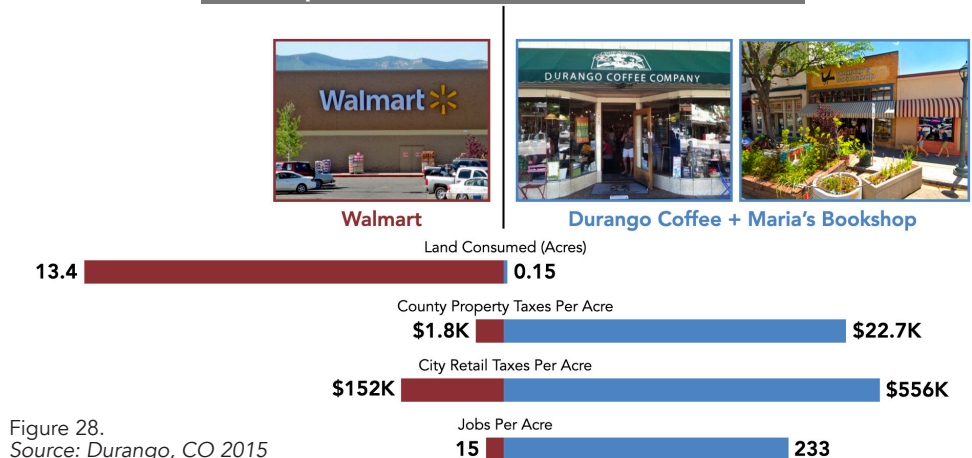


Figure 28. Source: Durango, CO 2015

## Urban Mirror

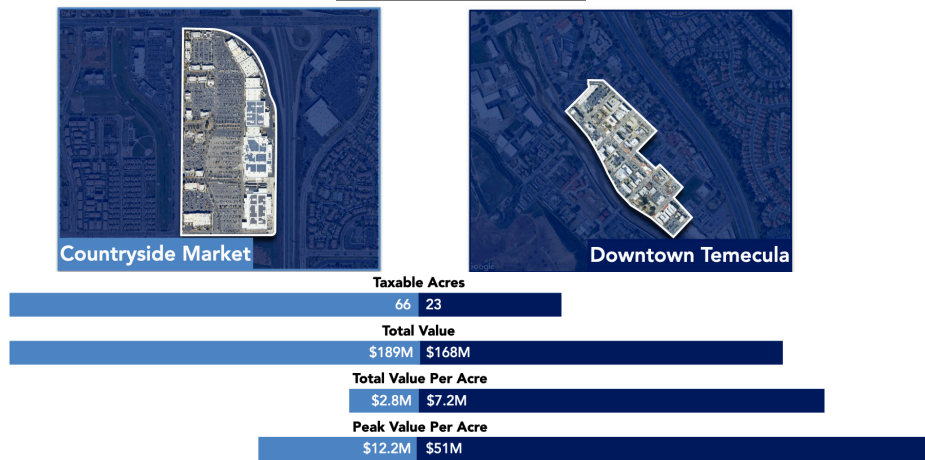


Figure 29.  
Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

# Regional Comparison

Although no peer city will provide a direct “apples to apples” comparison, engaging in this kind of quantitative analysis can provide valuable insight into both Menifee’s strengths and potential areas of improvement.

Temecula, CA serves as the most direct point of comparison. Although both cities have similar populations, their geographic footprints differ significantly. Temecula encompasses approximately 13,000 taxable acres, whereas Menifee has around 22,000. Despite its smaller size, Temecula’s total taxable value surpasses Menifee’s by \$6 billion—a difference largely attributable to the presence of a defined downtown area.

As illustrated in Figures 30 and 31, Temecula’s “purple mountain,” representing its downtown, generates about \$7.2 million per acre. In contrast, Menifee’s Countryside Marketplace yields approximately \$2.8 million per acre. Notably, Temecula’s downtown also includes the Truax Building, the county’s highest revenue-generating parcel, producing \$51 million per acre (Figure 32).

The value produced by dense downtowns is not geographically limited, however. Thriving downtowns maintain a symbiotic relationship with the broader city. As illustrated in the 3D value-per-acre models in Figure 30, property values across Temecula are, on average, about \$1 million higher per acre than those in Menifee. This is particularly evident in the red peaks found throughout Temecula’s residential neighborhoods. The close proximity to a vibrant, desirable downtown contributes significantly to this increased value—demonstrating that economic productivity tends to generate further economic productivity in surrounding subdivisions and neighborhoods as a downtown is a key amenity and ingredient for economic vitality and success.

## Regional Comparison: Menifee vs Temecula

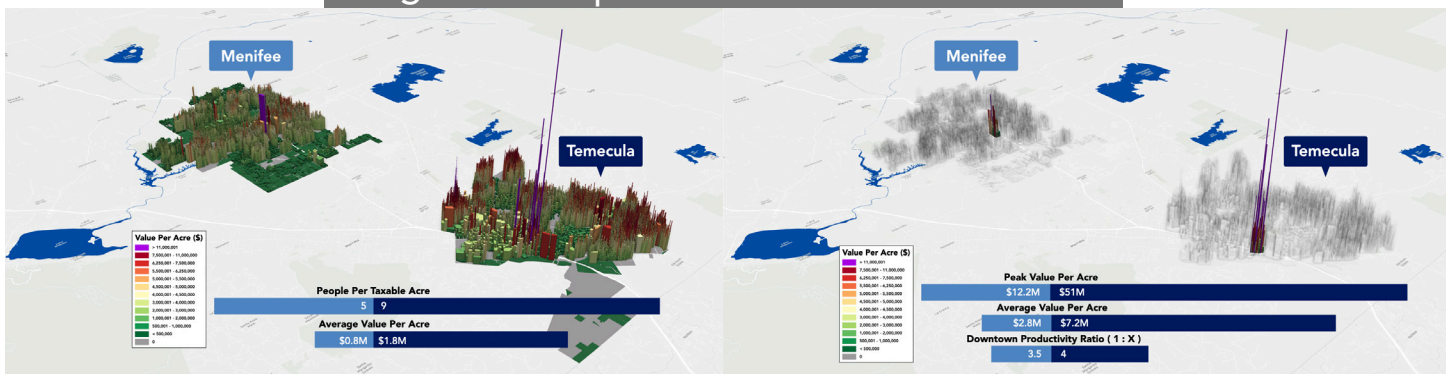


Figure 30.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

Figure 31.  
Source: Riverside County, CA

## Value Per Acre: Peak Parcel

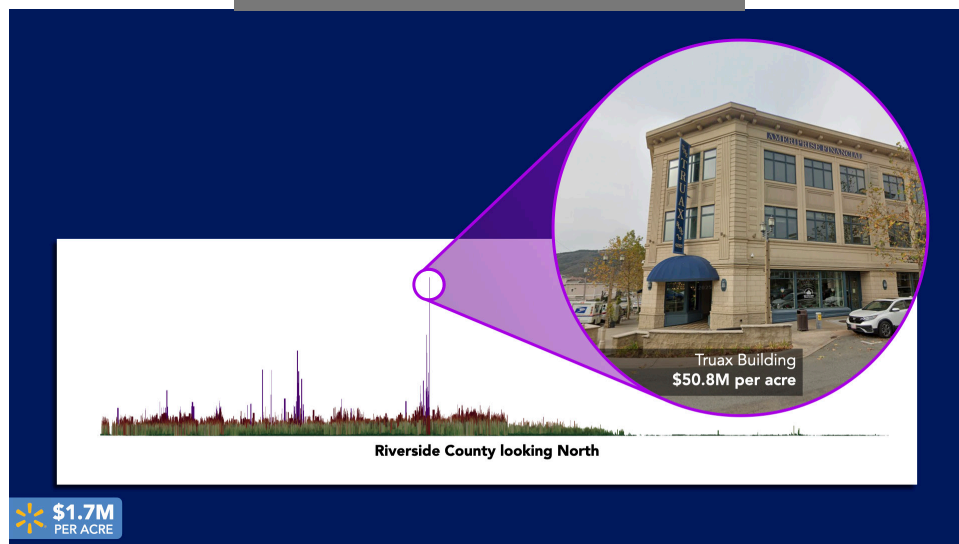


Figure 32.  
Source: Riverside County CA, Google Maps

## Key Takeaways

### Look for Examples of Productive Places and Replicate Them

Inspecting the Value Per Acre (VPA) model allows communities to link fiscally productive areas with their associated land use types. Riverside County has several examples of small but highly potent building types which contribute significantly to the community's fiscal health. Using such moderate to high productivity sample developments, such as smaller commercial stores, mixed use commercial or Missing Middle Housing types, as an example for how to build in the future can guide community conversation, vision, processes, and future regulations.

### Small Buildings Generate Incredible Productivity - and Sense of "Place"

Preserving lasting value in a community is crucial for the city's overall financial well-being and vitality. In Riverside County, historic properties are outperforming a lot of new developments. This demonstrates that older, smaller-scale buildings still in use contribute immensely to the city's fiscal and cultural fabric. Building places in Menifee like those built in Riverside County 100 years ago not only supports the local economy by enhancing property values, but also enriches the community's character, unique identity, placemaking, and tourism attraction.

### Know the Costs of Your Development Patterns

Urban3 has seen that funding for infrastructure systems (roads, sewer, water, stormwater) is insufficient in covering the lifecycle expenses for these systems, which are often referred to as unfunded liability or deferred maintenance in many older cities. This compounds significantly every decade. Certain users of these systems may not be paying for the true cost of what it takes to serve them (meaning other users are subsidizing them). Adjust fees, with geography in mind, to adequately cover the costs of operation and maintenance or encourage infill development rather than servicing new areas. To fully understand how and where revenues can offset costs, work with us again to conduct a full return on investment analysis, and also understand how street sizing, design, and parking standards impact prosperity from a revenue vs. expense perspective.

## Urban Form Influences Sales Tax Potency

The development of auto-oriented commercial properties often requires large amounts of land to satisfy parking and lot size minimums, using shared parking agreements, or vertically integrated parking, which requires more city investment in infrastructure to service those districts. On the other hand, cities can reduce the amount they need to invest in a commercial property by eliminating parking minimums, allowing for smaller commercial parcels. Most importantly, because these developments would consume less land, they would produce more sales and property tax per acre. By minimizing infrastructure expenses and maximizing potential tax revenue, Menifee can improve their return on investment, which will allow the city to experience greater fiscal sustainability and financial responsibility decades into the future. Cities need to be cognizant that they will be here in perpetuity.

## Thicken Up! Use Your Land Wisely and Consider the Long Term

As Menifee moves forward with future development, Urban3's analysis helps to ensure there can be a better understanding of the impact that different development types will likely have on the city's finances. The significant role that property tax, sale tax, and service fees play in the city's revenue generation has an important impact on land development considerations. Similarly, the dramatic differences in the cost of service delivery, primarily related to the key infrastructure systems that Menifee maintains, should also be a key consideration informing development decisions. Therefore, it is important for the city to utilize the land it has efficiently in terms of tax production and service delivery, while also planning for future infrastructure replacement costs.

### KEY AREAS OF FOCUS FOR MENIFEE, CA

- Create a balance of diverse housing choices.
- Address parking standards for large, non-revenue producing parking lots.
- Land Uses are not generating enough revenue to maintain the 'size' of your roadways, streets and intersections, which are going to create long-term liability if you don't change your level of service policy or land use mix/ density.
- Lower infrastructure costs by recalibrating existing roadways to create mobility choices beyond driving.
- Density is the concentration of people as a result of the thoughtful design of places. A higher concentration of people means increased revenues per acre will be able to reduce expense liabilities. Density is critical for economic development and business attraction.

# URBAN3

*Data-driven storytelling*

**Principal**

Joe Minicozzi, AICP

**Project Lead**

Jonathan Anzollitto

**Graphic Specialist**

Steven Hancher

**Program Manager**

Adam Carr, AICP

*All maps are created with ESRI software, and all data used in this analysis and report (unless otherwise noted) was provided by the Riverside County.*

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