

## PREFACE

Few documents have raised as much interest, and blood pressure, as has the “Beyond Sprawl” report prepared by representatives from the Greenbelt Alliance, Bank of America, California Resources Agency, and The Low-Income Housing Fund. Why?

This is one of the questions addressed in a series of papers prepared by members of the California Planning Roundtable. The California Planning Roundtable is an organization of experienced planning professionals who are members of the American Planning Association. Membership is balanced between the public and private sectors, and between Northern and Southern California. The Mission of the Roundtable is to promote creativity and excellence in planning by providing leadership in addressing important planning issues in California.

Each article presents a different perspective in the search for understanding and debating the issues of sprawl in California.

“Beyond Sprawl” proposes the following goals:

- ✪ To provide more certainty in indicating where new development should and should not occur.
- ✪ To make more efficient use of land that has already been developed, including a strong focus on job creation and housing in established urban areas.
- ✪ To establish a legal and procedural framework that will create the desired certainty and send the right economic signals to investors.
- ✪ To build a broad-based constituency to combat sprawl that includes environmentalists, community organizations, businesses, farmers, government leaders and others.

The intent of the report is to foster a dialogue on growth. It has been successful in fostering a dialogue. It has also been criticized for a hidden agenda and weak methodology.

Many sprawl issues have been simmering below the surface ready to boil over in every community in California. The report has become a lightning rod for long-standing disputes.

Consider these statements:

*“Until recent years, urban life was comparatively simple; but with the great increase and concentration of population, problems have developed, and constantly are developing which require, and will continue to require, additional restrictions in respect to the use and occupation of private lands in urban communities.”* From the U.S. Supreme Court upholding the zoning ordinances of the City of Euclid, Ohio in 1926.

*“Growth produces problems — physical, social and economic, Today we find such problems of increasing importance throughout the region in the form of cramped and insufficient highways, the need for Bay crossings, limited water supply and demand for improved transit and transportation.”* From Making Sense of the Region’s Growth by the Bay Area Council quoting Harland Bartholomew in 1925.

The issue cuts to the heart of planning. What are we planning? Is it efficient? For whom?

In the past, when suburban development has occurred on lands not previously developed, consequences have all too frequently included:

- loss of farmlands
- increased travel distances
- major infrastructure commitments
- degradation of environmentally valuable areas

What’s different now?

Does our reaction to sprawl prompt a periodic mea culpa, a sense of satisfaction, or the beginning of movement to change behavior? If we were to end our sprawlful ways, what would the steps look like?

Direct people to live in higher densities closer to the city center. Require developers to use vacant underutilized parcels within the existing metropolitan area. Prevent development beyond urban limit lines. Accommodate the critical workforce by mandating provisions of housing at prices corresponding to wage scales of added jobs. Reduce dependence on the auto through use of transit made more feasible by increased density and subsidy. Require cities to enforce a minimum, as well as maximum, densities. Create congestion priced road usage to penalize single occupant vehicles. Renew the transportation network in the metropolitan core.

Are we prepared to take such steps?

These questions come to mind:

1. Can we accept criticism of sprawl without violent reaction?
2. To what extent is this issue anti-growth?
3. To what extent is growth of suburbs in California attributable to “white flight” or economic flight? What is the flight from?
4. What market incentives encourage development to spread out? What incentives might encourage more compact development?
5. What is the price tag to make the central city more desirable than the suburb? As a State, are we willing to pay it?
6. What development patterns are we seeking to achieve? What will they look like? How will we know when we achieve them?
7. Who are the winners and losers if we continue on our current path? Who are the winners and losers if we follow the recommendations of the report?
8. If we were able to transition to compact-transit oriented development, which of our urban problems would vanish and which would remain?
9. Is sprawl the outcome of irreconcilable objectives?
10. What will be more effective as a change mechanism, the carrot, the stick or the inevitable?
11. What fiscal factors are at work in promoting growth beyond current urbanized areas?
12. Are companies and persons moving to the suburbs paying the true costs? If not, what are the subsidies and who is paying them? If they are paying more, where is their money going?

Since the mid 60’s, the population of California has doubled from sixteen million to thirty-two million. Cities like Sao Paulo or Hong Kong or Tokyo represent ultimate densities. What high-density American cities represent liveable models? Cities that were once compact, with great transit systems, like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, have spread out to suburbs as well. It appears that if a market economy exists, land sellers will try to increase their value by development; and home buyers, eager to escape urban problems or gain better value for their money, will commute.

The notion that open space is precious, and should be protected, has not prevented expansion.

We may all agree that we need to plan and develop our communities differently in response to 21st Century challenges. We can all point to problems of blight, inadequate housing, unemployment, and other problems, and seek new solutions. We can all agree that the problem is greater than existence of sprawl. The “Beyond Sprawl Report” has initiated a dialogue that will require all of us to contribute our ideas and energy. We hope the enclosed articles will add positively to that debate.

**Val Alexeeff, AICP**  
**Roberta Mundie, AICP**

## I. SPRAWL OR NEW SUBURBANISM

CONCEPT: “Sprawl” is a misleading and inaccurate condemnation of development Californians seek and find advantageous.

CONTEXT: Responses are provided to specific points raised in the “Beyond Sprawl” report.

QUESTION: Is there development that falls within the nebulous category of “sprawl” that is really the goal of good development?

### **Areas of Agreement**

On-going growth of California poses critical policy issues. The discussion of economic and demographic change appears necessary.

Most will agree with the general goals expressed in the report: economic health, social opportunity, quality of life, environmental protection/improvement, etc.

One can agree with the recommendations, though these are vague and support would depend on details.

### **Areas of Concern**

The ambiguity of the recommendations.

The “analysis” on which the recommendations are based seems incomplete and unbalanced with debatable assertions that blame all the problems and conflicts of our urban society on “sprawl”. On the contrary, and depending on the definition of “sprawl”, one could make the case that “sprawl” has actually been an entirely necessary and appropriate response to the massive and far-reaching growth and change California has faced since WWII (or even since WWI). It is possible that attempts to force compacted and tightly contained urbanization, as the report authors seem to advocate, would have led to yet more serious problems that those we now face.

There is no definition of what is meant by “sprawl”, the term used 68 times. Apparently it is anything “suburban”, but what is suburban? Most of what is now urban was once suburban. Also suburban today is hugely different from that of the 50’s or even 60’s or 70’s. The report treats “traditional suburban” seeming to ignore the dramatic evolution occurring in physical form and the land use patterns of outlying communities..

“Sprawl” becomes the all too convenient “whipping boy” for all our ills, and the threat of “sprawl” becomes the weapon to obstruct any development other than high density inner-city in-fill or rebuilding.

## **Purpose of Commentary**

It may be possible to work with the evolution of a “new suburbanism” geared to moderate density, closer-grained mix of use, and innovative urban design, and which is actually occurring, and adjust these current processes so as to address issues of concern.

## **Report Reflections**

“Low density” living is increasing in density. In the new cities of S. Orange Co., approximately half of all dwelling units are attached, with densities in the 12 to 20 dwelling units/Ac. range and some up to 30 and 40 /Ac. Detached units are normally 4 to 7 /Ac. and can be as high as 14/Ac. The most successful recent development in innercities is at these new suburban densities. We must question how much of our future growth can be accommodated in existing cities, especially given the importance of not disrupting and displacing existing communities.

Is raw land availability really an issue? Is all agricultural land sacrosanct? (250 million population @ 10 persons/Ac. = 25 million Ac. = 1+% of 2 billion Ac. in contiguous US;. Similar density for 30 million persons in California = 3 million Ac. = 3% of approximately 100 million Ac. in California). In some cases, “leapfrog” will accelerate dispersal and be beneficial.

Is the higher density mix of office, retail, apartments, entertainment/arts, and education uses near John Wayne Airport “sprawl”? Is it bad, or can a case be made that we need multiple centers in a region of 15 million?

Is urbanization in Central Valley or in Antelope Valley necessarily bad as State population continues to grow? Would increased density in the inner city exacerbate social problems?

Is increasing use of automobile best dealt with by arresting “sprawl”? Or should we instead expand telecommunication, develop third-tier transit that can work in the “new suburbanism”, and encourage better balances of urban activities in suburb?

Accusing middle class of “abandonment” may not respect the varied motives that have brought about suburbanization, i.e., it doesn’t reflect the fact that people die or retire, or that people are legitimately seeking to fulfill human dreams.

Should our policy emphasis be more on helping inner-city residents get housing in suburbs, a la HUD's MTO programs and fair share goals? This may be the only way to overcome income segregation. Conversely, since all net growth is basically non-Anglo and tends to have lower skills and incomes, forcing all growth into existing built-up areas could exacerbate income segregation.

Note that replicating infrastructure in new suburbs is not necessarily more expensive than expanding existing infrastructure in the innercity.

Why not aim at congestion pricing or tax base sharing to produce benefits and overcome problems, rather than seeking to shut down the process?

Academics and planning experts do NOT agree on the costs of dispersed growth patterns, or that the findings of "The Cost of Sprawl" report represent the "true expense to society".

Building and maintaining infrastructure in suburbs is not always more expensive than expanding and maintaining infrastructure in the inner-city. There are responsible people who advocate reducing innercity densities (note keynote speech by Clarence Page of Chicago Tribune at San Francisco Cal. APA Conf., 1993). Are social problems alleviated by forcing densification? One can argue it is the reverse.

Why do businesses move to the "sprawl" of Arizona if sprawl is the problem? Taxes would seem to result from many factors besides sprawl, and there are less spread out cities with higher taxes.

There are studies showing shorter commute times in metro areas with more dispersed development than in those that are more compact. (See "Congestion Trends in Metropolitan Areas", by Peter Gordon and Harry W. Richardson in Curbing Gridlock Vol. 2: Commissioned Papers for the National Research Council, 1994).

Re Agriculture: There are real questions about the balance of land and water use in this the most urban state. Ag uses 85% of our water, it pollutes heavily, it is very massively subsidized, and some crops might better be produced elsewhere. Pricing meat at its true cost could free up huge amounts of land and water while cutting air and water and pesticide pollution, improving health, and permitting extensive reforestation. Should lives of millions of urbanites be held hostage to the meat lobby?

There is definitely a need to protect sensitive habitats, and systems are in place and operating for much of this now. It's wrong to blame current practice for mistakes of past. We need to keep working on air and water pollution, but is containing and further densifying growth the best or only way?

Numerous programs exist that mitigate sprawl.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The world out there has come to believe that sprawl is stucco, is red tile roofs, is anything built on green fields since WWII, despite the fact that most of those denigrating sprawl are, by this definition, inhabitants of sprawl.

We can build on the positives and correct the negatives of new suburbanization and come out much better than we would if we put our energy and resources into attempting to reverse this momentum.

There is also the question of the American “DNA”: Isn’t there, for many Americans, a built-in pull towards settlement patterns that provide some contact with trees and gardens, a private entry, and private open space, however small? Indeed, this longing may not be unique to Americans.

I recommend we apply Kevin Lynch’s performance criteria: vitality, sense, fit, access, control, efficiency, and justice. His explanation of what is meant by each of these constitutes inspiring reading for those committed to the search for “good urban form”.

*Submitted by: Frank E. Hotchkiss, AIA, AICP*



## II. SPRAWL AND AGRICULTURE

**CONCEPT:** Sprawl continues to eliminate some of California's most agriculturally productive and environmentally sensitive lands.

**CONTEXT:** The effects of sprawl on agriculture are not limited to the edges of metropolitan areas.

**QUESTION:** Will we be able to provide a coordinated program to preserve agriculture?

### **BASIS FOR CONCERN**

Sprawl is occurring in metropolitan areas all over the country. What distinguishes our state, is the scale of development on some of the nation's most agriculturally productive and environmentally sensitive lands.

“Beyond Sprawl” repeatedly equates recent and past urbanization patterns in California. While there are definite similarities, there are real differences as well. Prior to the 1980's, population growth and the loss of agricultural lands (particularly in the Bay Area and Orange County) were tied closely to structural economic change. For the past fifteen years, however, the deconcentration of population has been linked to the search for affordable housing in areas with resource economics. The result of this growth has been an uneasy relationship between urban and agricultural interests.

“Beyond Sprawl” understates the extent to which fiscal considerations (especially after the passage of Proposition 13) have created incentives for suburbanization in California. Community growth requires both a willing buyer and a jurisdiction willing to accommodate development. Both have been present in developing regions. Households in large metropolitan areas seeking affordable housing elsewhere have broadened the geographic reach of housing markets on the metropolitan fringe and beyond. Many local officials in these latter areas, concerned about fiscal limits, have viewed new residential projects as a source of revenue, despite ever shrinking fiscal benefits.

### **IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURE**

Four impacts identified in “Beyond Sprawl” — loss of farmland, urbanization of farm communities, reduced crop yields due to pollution, and uncertainty of future use — are apparent throughout the State, but they are most telling in the fertile San Joaquin Valley. This eight county region, extending from San Joaquin in the north to Kern

in the south, plays a key role in California's agricultural economy. In both 1993 and 1994, six of these counties were among the top seven nationally in terms of the gross value of agricultural production, and each of the six had a gross value in excess of \$1 billion. Today more than one-third of the State's farms and farmlands are in the Valley.

The following underscore the scope and scale of the impacts on agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley:

- **The loss of farmland:** Suburban growth in the San Joaquin Valley has had a significant effect on farmland acreage. From 1987 to 1992, according to the most recent Census of Agriculture, close to 459,000 acres were lost. Over the ten year period of 1982-1992, the decline of more than 870,000 acres represented 8% of the Valley's agricultural acreage and 27% of all farmland lost in the State.

Interestingly, these changes may not fully describe the effect on agriculture because they do not take into account the quality of soils lost or gained. Prime agricultural lands in the "flatlands" (which are located near existing urban services) are preferred by those engaged in both agriculture and residential construction. Hence, one of the consequences of development on the urban fringe (the dominant pattern) has been the loss of prime farmland and the addition of lower quality soils to the agricultural inventory.

- **Rapid population change and the urbanization of farm communities:** During the 1980's, the San Joaquin Valley grew by 33.9% (to 2.7 million people) and all eight counties had growth rates that exceeded the Statewide average of 26%. This pattern of urban growth has continued in the 1990's. From April 1990 to January 1995, the regional population increased by 14%, compared to 8.6% for the State as a whole. By 1995, the eight county region had a population of more than 3.1 million, a larger population than 22 other states in the nation.

While the more populous cities in the region have grown at impressive rates, many historically small farming communities have experienced explosive population change. In the 1980's, for example, Patterson and Ripon, in the north, and Avenal, Corcoran, and California City, in the south, recorded population increases in excess of 100%. An even greater number throughout the Valley grew by more than 50%. This growth has persisted in the 1990's.

Not surprisingly, many of these farm communities have begun to exhibit the visible signs of urban stress - more congestion, overcrowded schools, and

inadequate infrastructure. Some have experienced debates over the protection of agricultural lands.

- **The Effects of Pollution:** The San Joaquin Valley is, topographically and meteorologically, a prime candidate for the trapping of pollution from stationary and mobile sources. While there is some disagreement about the precise effects, evidence from studies by the State and the University of California indicates that (1) urbanization in the Valley makes it more difficult to meet federal and State attainment standards and (2) pollution reduces selected crop yields.
- **Uncertainty:** The possibility of urban development in the foreseeable future encourages a “rational” farmer to adopt a short term strategy (the planting of row crops) rather than a more capital-intensive long term plan (the establishment of trees or vines). In the absence of a clear public commitment, there is a search for certainty in the private sector that often takes the form of a property rights claim. Whatever the merits of this claim, it has become an important factor in the planning process in agricultural areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

To document the tangible and far-reaching impacts of urbanization on agriculture is one thing. To develop a widely accepted framework for moving "beyond sprawl" is quite another. For the authors of *Beyond Sprawl*, what is needed is "a new development model" based on certainty, strategic alliances, and collaborative decision-making. While the building blocks of the model are attractive, the plea for a new paradigm implies a desire to move away from the architecture of the existing planning system. Given the political realities underlying the system, however, this is unlikely to occur. Perhaps what is needed instead is a more effective use of existing locally-based planning tools.

A key factor in more effective planning is "sharing." Sharing acknowledges the realities of localism but recognizes the positive benefits of a broader vision, one that extends beyond the boundary lines of a particular jurisdiction. It includes, but goes beyond, collaborative decision-making. For planners who are required to both protect agriculture and guide urban development (indeed, for all planners), it means learning from the experiences of others.

The San Joaquin Valley offers a case study of on-going urbanization in an agricultural region. The Bay Area provides vivid examples of how long-term and large-scale urban development encourages sprawl and impacts agricultural lands. Are there lessons to be learned from the past experiences of Bay Area counties? For many planners in the San Joaquin Valley, the answer is "yes." Although they

acknowledge that the forces underlying growth in the two regions may not be identical, they do appreciate the fact that the consequences are similar.

Likewise, planners in the Bay Area recognize the value of learning from other jurisdictions and past experience, they seek to protect agriculture in the future. The results are revealed in Santa Clara, Sonoma, and Napa Counties, among others:

- A cooperative, “shared” planning process was recently begun in Santa Clara County. The City of Gilroy, LAFCO, and the County itself decided to jointly study the effects of urbanization on the agricultural lands east of Gilroy, and work together to formulate a new mixture of policies and programs to create a more stable, long-term boundary between the urban and agricultural areas.
- In Napa and Sonoma Counties, new local planning strategies are being employed not only to protect agricultural land but also to support agricultural production,. One tool is a streamlined process for farmworker and farm family housing. Sonoma County has fostered a supportive agricultural product marketing program. And voters there recently approved a 25 cent increase in the sales tax (which will generate \$10 million a year) to purchase development rights from farmers who then recapitalize dairies and vineyards.
- Sprawl in California typically results from multi-jurisdictional decisions. Most suburban development happens within cities, which annex vacant and partly developed lands from counties with the approval of LAFCOs. Some suburban development is allowed by counties around less-than-delighted cities. Given the dispersal of land use management authority among these players, the long-term preservation of agricultural land against the pressures of sprawl will most effectively occur only through their coordinated efforts. Of equal importance is the need to include agriculturalists themselves in the pursuit of agricultural land preservation. It is not enough to place road blocks on development. There must be incentives for cooperative support for agriculture among all the interests.

***Submitted by Ken Entin,  
Paul Crawford, AICP,  
Ken Milam, AICP***

### III. LEGACY OF NEGLECT

- CONCEPT:** Many of the aging suburbs of the 1940's and 50's are starting to suffer the same neglect as the older "inner cities".
- CONTEXT:** Significant portions of Los Angeles County's older suburbs are acquiring "urban" dimensions of social malice and physical deterioration, unable to discover tools for revitalization.
- QUESTION:** Must "new" development always have a negative effect on whatever is "older"? What needs to be done to make both the old and new development more balanced, to meet more of the economic and social needs of their users?

In the last half-century, there has been a pattern of systematic disinvestment in, and neglect of, established urban cores. At the same time, new development on the periphery—wherever it happens to be—seems to prosper.

The San Fernando Valley, once the epitome of middle-class suburbia, is now pot-marked with distressed commercial strips, deteriorated residential sectors and turfs of battling youth gangs. Even the South Bay, perhaps one of the most "blessed" portions of the county, is host to communities such as the City of Hawthorne, now struggling to stave off bankruptcy. In form, these areas are utterly tract suburban. But they have become old; they have been passed over.

Make no mistake, the "urban core" neighborhoods still are the most destitute and distressed, perhaps more than ever. But as we leave the 50's and 60's behind, the litany of the distressed is falling increasingly outside of the conventional stereotypes of "urban core versus suburban tract development."

#### **Coping with the Fear of Old Age**

Everything gets old, wears down and, if not effectively tended to, wears out. In the analogy, every patch and thread of the built environment needs to have its strategies for re-weaving and rebuilding itself to maintain the larger urban fabric. But self-reliance, at least at the smallest level, is often elusive and may even be infeasible.

There are always those elements of youth, being new, that abuse the time that they have, ignoring the most fundamental certainty: we all grow old. Aging, in turn, brings on circumstances that threatens or even overwhelms our vitality.

For many parts of Southern California, we may already have the seeds of a troublesome legacy. We have enormous sections of suburban development aging

almost in lockstep--parts of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, for example--that seem to be losing their ability to help themselves faster than they are able to perceive and reinvent themselves. It might be that there are sections of neighboring Orange County, developed slightly later, that could face a similar situation.

### **Defining a Wiser Selfishness**

Economic and social obsolescence is exacerbated when any particular development commodity overwhelms the market at some point in its life cycle. One key to staying vital in old age is to avoid large, homogeneous segments that are all aging the same way. "Constructive diversity" of development can help minimize the creation of an unusable surfeit of certain types of assets and the risk of being overwhelmed by the cumulation of their liabilities.

The communities that will be the strongest and the most enduring are those that are the most knowing and committed. Those that achieve vitality nurture it scrupulously but recognize that it is nonetheless transient, and its durability depends to a great extent on the richness of a broader development diversity.

Securing community vitality over the long term means to invest it and share it. At least some of that investment would be most wisely spent partnering with complementary communities — ones with different resource and aging cycles.

How do we make these investments in ourselves — especially when "ourselves" comes to mean parts of a larger community quite different from ourselves? That's a very large and complicated question. But if we can agree that this is the sort of question that we should be asking, it will certainly be a very rewarding one to begin to try to answer.

*Submitted by Jeff Carpenter, AICP*

## IV. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**CONCEPT:** Require development to be sustainable — to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**CONTEXT:** San Diego County is 4,200 square miles in size, including 18 incorporated cities and 2.7 million people. Population projections show an additional 1.2 million people by the year 2015. This represents an average annual increase of 48,000 persons and a 40% growth between 1990 and 2015.

**QUESTION:** Can a region do enough to be sustainable?

### **Challenge**

How will the San Diego region accommodate the projected residential growth? Current plans do not designate enough urban residential land to accommodate the regionwide forecast. The allocation of regionwide growth beyond 2005 requires 37,400 acres, where there are only 21,500 acres of urban residential land left in 2005. This is a 74% shortfall and translates into 82,900 unallocated housing units and 220,400 people.

The issue is not the total amount of acreage available for development, but how those acres are currently planned. Current plans permit low intensity residential development — over 90% of the region's vacant residential land is planned for rural densities. Even vacant urban land is designated for low densities: 71% is zoned for a maximum density of less than six units per acre, while only 7% is zoned for 15 units per acre or more. With this type of land use pattern, by the year 2015 low density residential development could be spread out over the landscape.

Current plans also do not provide for a contiguous working habitat system for native plants and animals. Ignoring the needs of native species in the wake of tremendous growth pressures may accommodate today's development needs, but at the cost of future economic disruption.

The region is attempting to resolve the complex task of redirecting growth by encouraging higher densities in appropriate areas and planning for the long-term needs of native plants and animals.

### **Land Use Distribution**

The region has prepared a Land Use Distribution Element which sets forth proactive steps the jurisdictions should take to help manage future growth. It includes policies to help the region accommodate anticipated population growth, provide a comprehensive open space and habitat system, reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality, and implement a development pattern that mitigates against continued sprawl. It also addresses jobs/housing balance and focuses on the location, intensity and design of urban communities, and the relationship of these communities to the planned transportation system.

There are four land use policies of the element: (1) focus higher intensity new development in areas with good transit access, (2) plan for lower intensities elsewhere, (3) include housing in the region's major employment centers, and (4) emphasize walking and bicycling in the design of new communities.

The impacts of these policies were evaluated and compared to current general plan policies. Implementation of these policies would result in: (1) reduced automobile travel (saving more than \$450 million per year), (2) shorter commute times (saving an average of 40 hours per year per commuter), (3) increased transit ridership (30,000 or 15%), (4) energy savings of \$200 million by the year 2010, and (5) enhanced capacity to accommodate the region's growth while providing more vacant land for habitat preservation and open space.

## **Habitat Preservation**

Preserving open space for native species in a recessionary economy is considered a luxury by many. Yet, in San Diego, it is considered an investment in the economy. The region is preparing Natural Communities Conservation Plans (NCCP) to provide certainty to those who want to develop their property. It does this by clearly identifying those areas which should be preserved, how they should be financed, and by definition, which areas should be urbanized. NCCP is designed to keep development that is expected to occur in the region from being disrupted by future listings of endangered species. Such constructive planning of future needs is essential. The region's economic growth and the successful restructuring of the local economy depend on new public and private investment in capital and technology. Private investment in the local economy could be curtailed if businesses and investors view San Diego as a risky destination for investment dollars, a place where environmental conflicts remain unresolved. Forward-looking environmental planning can position the region to attract critical capital investment.

A recent economic analysis prepared for the City of San Diego's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), a subregional NCCP plan, indicates that preserving lands through this program will have a net beneficial effect on the local economy over the existing "no preserve" alternative. Over time, the MSCP will avoid an estimated



\$401 million in costs associated with project approval delays and disruptions. In addition to these savings, the net revenue benefits exceed MSCP direct costs by \$21 million. Indirect benefits include between \$1.2 and \$1.3 billion of additional personal income to the region. The regional job base will increase by 33,000 jobs, future employment and housing growth will be fully accommodated, and income growth will allow 5,000 additional households to afford homeownership.

Economic vitality demands growth. The right kind of growth will sustain other benefits as well.

*Submitted by Janet Fairbanks, AICP*

## V. WITHIN SPRAWL: CAN THE TRI-VALLEY AREA RETROFIT THE SUBURBS?

**CONCEPT:** Conduct joint planning efforts to develop policies that coordinate development and infrastructure in an orderly pattern.

**CONTEXT:** A 363 square mile area located generally between the East Bay hills and the Altamont Pass, south of Mount Diablo State Park, along the 580 Corridor.

**QUESTION:** Can the established suburban pattern be improved?

The Tri-Valley area, the far eastern portion of San Francisco Bay Area, is a place that helped to define the term “suburban sprawl”. Now elected officials from five cities and two counties are working together in a voluntary effort to address the issues described in the “Beyond Sprawl” report.

The area was primarily agricultural until the completion of the freeway system in the 60’s and 70’s, when single-family suburban tracts proliferated. In the 80’s, the area became a major “edge city” employment center, with the development of large business parks containing “back offices” for San Francisco-based corporations. More growth is projected by the year 2010 — an increase of 77% from the present 78,000 housing units and an 83% increase from the present 110,200 jobs.

Elected officials from five cities — Danville, Dublin, Livermore, Pleasanton, and San Ramon — and Alameda and Contra Costa Counties have formed the Tri-Valley Planning Committee (TVPC) to prepare a Subregional Planning Strategy for the area. The Strategy will address issues of location and intensity of urban development, natural resources, transportation, housing, and economic development. A major purpose of the Strategy will be to guide amendments to local general plans. It is also possible that a permanent subregional entity may be established to coordinate various activities, such as affordable housing, open space acquisition, and economic development, which small individual jurisdictions cannot effectively perform alone.

Some of the policies which the TVPC has tentatively approved so far include:

- Ensure that new development occurs in a compact pattern, and in an orderly manner linked to the provision of urban services.
- Establish urban growth boundaries as a long-term limit to urban development and services.
- Discourage “leap-frog” development.
- Establish permanent areas of contiguous open space outside urban growth boundaries.
- Coordinate development policies and capital improvements programming within spheres of influence.
- Protect environmental resources and agricultural land.
- Locate employment, housing, and services close together, to reduce the need to travel.
- Encourage infill, redevelopment and reuse of vacant and under-used parcels within existing urban areas,
- Discourage the use of single-occupant automobiles and improve public transit and other alternative transportation modes.
- Increase opportunities for people to work at home or in telecommuting centers near residential neighborhoods.
- Undertake subregional programs to provide housing for low- and moderate-income families and for people with special needs.
- Cooperate in subregional economic development programs to attract and retain businesses that employ Tri-Valley residents.
- Encourage the community college, school districts, and Tri-Valley businesses to cooperate in job training, retraining, and “lifetime learning” programs.
- Advocate changes in State fiscal policies in order to offset revenue-driven land use policies.

Other active participants in the process have been the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, East Bay Regional Parks District, various service provider agencies, environmental groups, and the Tri-Valley Business Council.

What brought about this commitment on the part of local governments, other agencies and organizations, and citizens to plan together on a voluntary basis? One factor was a history of acrimonious, expensive lawsuits among various jurisdictions over development proposals. Many residents, as well as elected officials, believe that it is better to decide in advance when annexations should occur and what development standards should be, rather than having the courts determine settlement agreements.

Another factor is the traffic congestion caused in large part by the commute of workers who live “over the hill” to the east, in San Joaquin County, because they cannot afford housing in the Tri-Valley area. Another consideration is the recognition that economic development throughout the subregion has mutual benefits for all, and that the cities should be cooperating, rather than competing. There is also a growing awareness of the potential benefits of pooling resources, for example mitigation banking, open space acquisition, and affordable housing programs. The fact that a Bay Area Rapid Transit line will be extended into the Tri-Valley area offers the opportunity to plan for higher density housing in areas near future transit stations.

It was also felt that smaller subregions share common problems and offer a grater potential for cooperative planning. The Association of Bay Area Governments provided a \$55,000 grant to the Tri-Valley group as a pilot project to develop the subregional Strategy.

The policies emerging from the Tri-Valley planning effort offer the promise of redirecting growth in a compact pattern, with more opportunities for affordable housing and transit use. While the predominantly low-density character of the area has already been established and is not likely to change drastically, it may be possible to reuse and retrofit parts of the area in an urban form that will be friendlier to the social fabric and the environment.

As one elected official from a 1980’s-style suburb said, “We really would like to have a downtown.”

***Submitted by Marjorie Macris, AICP***

## VI. NEW PATTERNS OF GROWTH TO FIT NEW CALIFORNIA

CONCEPT: New patterns of growth are needed to fit the new California.

CONTEXT: Suburbia has worked in the past and a new model has been evolving to meet current needs.

QUESTION: If suburbia is cast as the cause of all problems, what will be there for future generations?

“Beyond Sprawl” attributes virtually every societal and environment ill found in California to urban sprawl and then equates sprawl with suburbia. Neither the term “sprawl” nor “suburban” are defined in the document, but they seem to mean anything which is built at the expanding edge of a metropolitan area.

The majority of growth which has taken place in California over the past 50 years can be loosely defined as suburban. Because of the tremendous population pressure the State has been under during this period, there were no other alternatives. The 25 million additional residents California has gained since the end of WWII could not all have been accommodated in the innercities, nor could they have been absorbed by our rural towns and cities without changing the entire nature of those communities. As in the rest of the nation, it is suburbia which has bloomed in California during the second half of the 20th century.

Suburbia has provided new, relatively affordable housing for these new residents and accommodated the growth and evolution in business and industry which have occurred during this period. If economic growth had remained confined within the boundaries of the State’s largest cities as they existed in the late 40’s, California would not now be among the leading economies of America, let alone the world.

An aspect of suburbia which bothers people is the tendency for suburban communities to merge, thereby obliterating whatever identify they may once have possessed. Opponents of suburban development commonly cite what has happened in the San Fernando and Santa Clara Valleys as the inevitable result of suburban growth. However, there are many suburban cities (even in Santa Clara County) which are distinctive even though they are part of an urban agglomeration. Communities such as Los Gatos, Danville, and Palo Alto have maintained their character due to their distinctive downtowns. Cities such as Pleasanton, Moraga, and Sausalito have retained their identify because of physical separation from their neighbors, attractiveness of location and other reasons.

The prescription in “Beyond Sprawl” for how California should accommodate its future population growth is both disingenuous and faulty. The statement is made that the authors’ approach “does not mean stopping growth at the fringe”, but instead calls for “utilizing land at the suburban fringe more efficiently and encouraging the reuse of land and other development opportunities in already developed areas.” This is really saying an urban limit line should be drawn at the suburban fringe with no additional non-rural development to take place beyond said line.

Such a prescription is unworkable. Even with slow economic growth, natural increase will boost California’s population by approximately 500,000 per year. This is 10 million additional residents over the next two decades. While it is theoretically possible to accommodate that number of people within the State’s existing metropolitan areas, market forces will not permit it to occur.

This, then, leads to another prescription of “Beyond Sprawl”, a legal and procedural framework should be established to create the desired certainty and send the right economic signals to investors. What this is calling for is the creation of governmental incentives to encourage development within the urban limit line and punishment for building outside of it; i.e., to manipulate the market. The paper calls for setting up a system of rewards and penalties based upon a development’s proximity to the urban core or suburban fringe. Although this is couched in terms of development paying its own way, recent experience in the development community shows that local governments are now asking builders to pay for things older residents were never required to shoulder, such as open space, habitat, visual resources, etc.

While redevelopment of our innercities and more efficient use of in-fill areas is certainly desirable urban expansion (sprawl) will continue in California because of the numbers involved and the cultural and societal demands of our changing population (virtually all ethnic and minority groups have the same “American Dream” as far as housing is concerned). Therefore, suburbia will continue to bloom. Many things are now occurring, however, which will help ensure a suburban form more palatable to those who have disparaged it in the past.

For over two decades, cities have been processing large development projects under planned district (PD) zoning in order to better negotiate with landowners about amenities to be provided to the city. More recently, specific plans have been frequently employed to achieve the same result. Open space is almost always one of these amenities. In some projects, it may constitute 75% to 80% of the property. Since the specific plan/PD process (as opposed to traditional zoning) is now being used almost exclusively by cities on the metropolitan fringe, suburbia is taking on a different form in these areas than it possesses closer in to the urban core. Instead of the “cheek by jowl” pattern of the Los Angeles Basin and Santa Clara Valley, the development form of these fringe suburbs is being dictated by terrain, special status

species location, critical habitat, visual resources, geotechnical factors, agricultural practices, etc.

In the future, this process will be accentuated by increased constraints placed on land development by its interaction with the natural environment. Activities to analyze the carrying capacity of land on a regional basis before development proceeds are now occurring. Habitat management plans are underway in many counties and the State's Natural Communities Conservation Planning program addresses the same types of issues. These two processes, along with others, seek to establish a viable and balanced relationship between the natural and built environments before any appreciable development takes place.

This preemptive approach is, in all likelihood, the wave of the future and promises a superior suburban form. The need to save prime agricultural land, critical habitat, wetlands, etc., will be more generally accepted by developers. Conversely, the need to provide sufficient area for urbanization should be more acceptable to environmentalists. The result will be a more harmonious accommodation of all species which inhabit the State. It will allow the creation of a built environment far preferable, in many respects, to the urban core. For this reason, suburbia will continue to grow and prosper, but it won't conjure up the negative images attributed to it by the authors of "Beyond Sprawl".

***Submitted by Robert Harris***