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**SPECIAL FOCUS-- GRAPPLING WITH GROWTH IN CALIFORNIA**

## **Grappling with Growth - a Silicon Valley Business View**

*By Leslee Coleman*

*Leslee Coleman is vice president of the Santa Clara Valley Manufacturing Group, Silicon Valley's trade organization. This article is excerpted from her presentation at an IEH workshop in Fresno County in November 1997.*

**O**ne of the things I've noticed as I've been working on urban growth issues is that we live in a society of perceived infinite resources. We always believe there is some better place we can go to, where our problems will magically disappear, where there will be vast open spaces for us to develop however we like with no consequences. I used to think that about Northern California.

I grew up in Los Angeles. You don't have to be there long before you look for somewhere with cleaner air and less traffic congestion. I heard that Northern California was that better place, moved north five years ago and discovered that Silicon Valley faces many of the same challenges as Los Angeles. But there is one very important difference. In Silicon Valley the business community, the environmental community and others really try to work together to solve our problems in new and innovative ways.

We live in a world of very finite resources and in order to continue growing economically, we have to learn how to use those precious resources wisely. There are three things that we have done in Silicon Valley to try to do just that:

### **Three Broadly-Supported Growth Strategies in the Silicon Valley**

- an infill housing strategy which protects agricultural lands and fosters transit.
- transit systems that get people to and from their jobs without a car.
- urban growth boundaries.

We've found the key to achieving these goals is to build broad based coalitions and solve the problems together. If we create winners and losers, we all lose. We have to learn how to work together.

The Silicon Valley economy is growing rapidly. In 1996 we had about 40,000 new jobs but only built about 7,000 new homes, so we have a little bit of a problem. Back in 1992 we did a survey of high-tech Silicon Valley workers and we found that one worker in five between the ages of 18 and 30 actively sought employment outside of the region in the previous 12 months. These are the workers that our companies fight desperately to keep and one in five of them was seeking employment outside the region. Why? High housing costs and traffic congestion.

Silicon Valley's future is determined by our quality of life because our most important product is the brain power of the employees. And when the employees who create the technology of tomorrow are stalled in traffic, choking on poor air quality, or can't afford a home, they are going to look to greener pastures elsewhere. So what do we do? We have to learn to manage our growth in a way that preserves our quality of life and reflects the diversity of our growing community.

### **High Housing Costs**

A couple of years ago Albuquerque, New Mexico attracted a Silicon Valley company with 1,200 high paying jobs. Low housing costs in Albuquerque were key to this move. The median price of a home in Santa Clara county is about \$380,000, compared with about \$127,000 nation-wide. The median household income for a family of four is \$70,000 in the Santa Clara Valley, \$35,000 nationwide. Even with the high median household income, 7 in 10 Silicon Valley residents cannot afford the median priced home.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# News from IEH

The Institute for Ecological Health (IEH) addresses the relationships between people, economy, land and nature. Urban, suburban and rural growth in the face of projected rapid population increases presents California and several other states with a tremendous challenge in the decades ahead. Numerous interests recognize that continuing current development patterns will cause immense problems. We need to change how communities grow in order to protect wildlife habitat, farm and range land, and open space, as well as to avoid creating additional huge megacities. This is a critical IEH issue.

The California state government avoids growth issues. However new coalitions are appearing in several areas to address sprawl and its consequences. They include business, agricultural and development interests. The first two articles in this *Linkages* describe some of these local efforts. They provide encouragement that our society is beginning to Grapple with Growth, that we can enact needed change in rapidly growing areas. Protection of important landscapes and development of communities providing a high quality of life is possible. In addition, this issue explores LAFCOs: important county-level bodies that approve expansion of city and special district boundaries. Most people know nothing about LAFCOs, which operate behind the scenes and go unnoticed in consequence. We need to bring LAFCOs into high public visibility. Thank you to the authors, and to Eric Rowell and Corrine Hartnett for graphics material.

The next issue of *Linkages* will continue to explore key growth issues, including conservation of wildlife habitat and rural landscapes, and land protection mechanisms like Transfer Development Rights.

## Recent Workshops.

IEH held very successful Grappling with Growth workshops in Fresno County and Modesto, last November and May respectively. Individuals from a wide range of interests came together to explore key growth issues and possible solutions for the San Joaquin Valley and adjacent Sierra Foothills. Speakers ranged from urban redeveloper Dan Cort to former Visalia mayor Mary Louise Vivier. A special thank you to our speakers, and the contributing sponsors who made these important events possible.

## Great Valley Center Grant Underwrites this *Linkages*

We are most appreciative of our recent LEGACI grant from the Modesto based Great Valley Center, to support our activities in the Central Valley, especially communications and workshops. This issue of *Linkages* is partially under-written by our LEGACI grant. The Valley's population is expected to triple in the next few decades, so Grappling with Growth is extremely important topic for this region.

**Individual donations form IEH's financial basis** - thank you to all who ave donated in the past. ***We need the support of you, our readers, in order to produce Linkages. Please send your contribution today (form on page 12)***

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Providing information on California land issues, including conservation biology, planning and economics, development, urban design, and agriculture. We explore the needs of different interests and creative solutions. We welcome articles, story ideas, and letters.

### IEH Web Site

[www.instituteforecologicalhealth.org](http://www.instituteforecologicalhealth.org).

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(continued from page 1) A first year school teacher in Mountain View, one of the higher paying school districts, makes about \$29,000/year. An administrative assistant with a year of experience makes about \$29,000. Jump to electrical engineers, the people making the computer chips and everything that makes the Valley run. After three to five years experience, they make about \$61,000.

To buy that new, median priced (\$380,000) home, you need a \$102,000 annual household income, a 10% down payment and no debts. This really is death for industry. We can recruit workers right out of Berkeley or Stanford and they're happy living five people to a house for a couple years. But when they want to settle down and set some roots down in the community, they look outside of Silicon Valley and outside of California. That threatens our economy and our growth.

## Traffic Congestion and Urban Sprawl

Commutes and traffic are the second reason our employees say it's tough to be in Silicon Valley. Sometimes we think that Silicon Valley is a monument to sprawl. San Jose itself is 175 square miles. The homes on the outskirts of the San Jose area are about 40 miles from the center of Silicon Valley and it can take people up to two hours to get from home to work.

When we started to develop in the 60's and 70's, we saw massive open space, developed at about 5 units to the acre and built freely. Today, we are realizing the costs of that kind of growth. With homes and jobs located farther and farther apart, commute times increase, remaining agricultural land is threatened, air quality problems are mounting, and lost productivity threatens our physical and economic vitality.

Every day in Silicon Valley our engineers lose an estimated 34,000 work hours sitting in traffic. 34,000 hours a day wasted and we have product life cycles that are 6 to 9 months long! Your product could be dead and gone before you're out of your car. This congestion really threatens our economic vitality. It starts at 5 in the morning - it doesn't matter how early or late you get up. It's bad news. It is costing each resident about \$800 a year, just in wasted fuel, sitting in traffic.

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### **“Sprawl creates intolerable commutes”**

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Some of our workers who can't afford housing in Silicon Valley purchase homes in the San Joaquin Valley and make the long drive. That really takes its toll. Say you work in Silicon Valley and purchase a house in Modesto. You and your spouse have a child. By the time that child graduates from high school, the two of you will have spent 3 years of your life in your car. That's time that

could have been spent with your family, getting involved in the community, working on that new high tech product.

You're spending it, instead, commuting and sooner or later you're going to wake up and realize that it is just not worth it. Sprawl creates intolerable commutes.



Eric Rowell

## The Solutions - Infill, Transit, Boundaries

The three solutions are creating infill housing near jobs, creating transit that moves people to and from jobs, and creating an urban growth boundary to keep us all honest. These three legs of the stool have to work together or the stool falls apart. The secret to making all three happen is coalition building.

### Infill Housing

This is new housing located within an existing urban area, close to jobs, transit and services. In theory it makes communities work better to have infill housing. But theory is very different than the actual implementation.

Three years ago the Manufacturing Group came together with Santa Clara Valley area planning staff and formed the Housing Action Coalition. The coalition decided that because of high housing costs we need to work together to build more housing that people can afford.

We identified the key problem to building this housing - NIMBYISM. “We don't want any infill housing in our back yard, go build it in that utopia out there somewhere else.” We all know this is not possible, so we pulled together a coalition of people we thought would work with us in building housing we agreed was good.

Founding coalition members included the Sierra Club, the Greenbelt Alliance, the Building and Construction Trades Council, the Building Industry Association, the Manufacturing Group, numerous Chambers of Commerce and local elected officials. We asked everyone to leave their sticks at the door and came up with a set of criteria we all

agreed would be good for the Valley, criteria defining a good infill housing project. Those criteria were devised in many, many hours of working together and building consensus. They are based on the Local Government Commission's Ahwahnee principles. We decided that if a project met our criteria we would line up at city council hearings and actively advocate for that project to be built.

For the last three years we have actively supported good infill projects. We go to public hearings and we become the voice for future residents. We've supported nearly fifty different housing proposals in 12 Silicon Valley cities that provided 14,000 new homes. All of the projects met the criteria. This was no easy task. At one of the first hearings there were 34 speakers lined up against a project and one speaker, a coalition member, in support. The local government approved the project, bringing 200 affordable units near a transit line to downtown San Jose.

Sometimes I think we have a very difficult time accepting each other in our own backyards but that is the challenge of growth. We have to learn how to do that.

## **Transit and Traffic Congestion.**

One of the keys to solving traffic congestion is providing alternatives to the car. People do not understand why a business group advocates for transit, but we keep visualizing those 34,000 work hours lost every day.

Back in 1984 we ran and successfully passed Measure A, the very first ½ cent sales tax measure for transportation. This was the result of a lot of frustration and a desire to build the east-west Highway 85.

That measure expired and in 1992 we ran another sales tax campaign. This time 90% of the money was for transit, to put in place a comprehensive transit system. The measure passed with a majority vote, but a court challenge resulted in the decree that any sales tax measure for a specific purpose needs a 2/3 vote.

We were pretty discouraged, but we didn't take no for an answer. We developed a new set of measures, A and B. Measure A was advisory, a list of very specific transit and road improvements, 50% transit and 40% roads. It advised the county supervisors that any new sales income should fund these transportation projects. Measure B was a ½ cent sales tax for general county purposes. In 1996 we won with this approach, obtaining the majority vote needed for a general purpose sales tax.

This was no small feat. We pulled together about 200 individuals and organizations throughout the county, including the AARP, senior disabled groups, the League of Women Voters, the business community, Greenbelt Alliance, traffic planners, transit advocates and others. We developed a balanced plan, a package of road and rail improvements that everybody agreed we needed.

This package provided the second leg of the stool, transit that helps give people access to jobs and housing without having to drive everywhere. This measure will generate 1.2 billion dollars for traffic relief projects over the next 9 years. It will double both our light rail system and Cal Train service ( the main service for getting commuters up and down the corridor). It will provide 10 million dollars for bicycle improvements, which had never been included in a sales tax measure before. Very, very successful, unprecedented anywhere in California. The victory is being challenged, but we won at the Superior Court level and are confident of winning the appeal.

## **Urban Growth Boundaries**

The final leg of the stool is an Urban Growth Boundary. This delineates where the Urban Services Area ends and the green hills of open space start. It focuses development in the urban area, where city services can be offered most cost effectively. It protects the open space and farm land.

Citizens of San Jose passed a greenline initiative in 1996, creating an Urban Growth Boundary. The initiative was sponsored by the Greenbelt Alliance, and supported by the Manufacturing Group, the San Jose Downtown Association, labor and others. By working together we built a county wide consensus. It's now being passed in different cities throughout the county.

I really think the growth boundary helps keep us honest. We talk about wanting infill housing and transit. When you actually draw an urban limit line, it makes it clear that we are not going to be tempted to build where we have all decided we don't want to.

## **Challenges for the Future**

Building infill housing, new transit systems and creating urban growth boundaries present unique challenges in and of themselves. They make us come to grips with the finite limits of our physical world, the fact that there is no new frontier or new country to discover and develop. They force us to make the best of what we have.

As we think about sustainability we need to ask ourselves where shall we live, where is the best place for the human environment to be. If we as a society wish to continue to grow and prosper economically and enjoy the quality of life benefits that come with that prosperity, we have to make room for each other. We have to care enough about our communities to learn to live together and not to drive people further apart.

# Shifting Attitudes to Sprawling Development Portend Major Changes in the Politics of Growth

By John Hopkins and Ron Bottorff

California is heading toward an essential shift in how society accommodates growth and land-use. Over past decades growth has generated sprawling metropolitan areas, based upon low density development and rigid separation of uses (housing, shopping, commerce). With California's population expected to grow from 32 million in 1996 to more than 47 million by 2020 (California Department of Finance), society cannot afford to continue this "business as usual". An increasing number of business, development and agricultural entities are recognizing the need for change, especially the need to conserve the state's important farmlands.

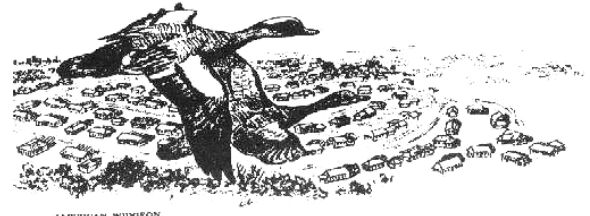
During past years California has been unable to grapple with growth at the state level, and has slipped far behind many other states, from Oregon to Maryland, that have taken major action to manage growth and protect valuable rural landscapes. But now we are seeing a wide variety of actions at the local and county level, as more and more citizens and organizations realize we must change how we develop in California.

Voters in several San Francisco Bay Area cities adopted urban growth boundaries over the past two years. Business interests in Silicon Valley recognize the need for change (see page 1). Farm, business and building industries are proposing strong farmland conservation actions in some of the major agricultural counties in our state. This is a great shift in attitudes, which could well spread across the entire state in the next few years. It suggests we are heading for major changes in local government growth policies, and new relationships between our metropolitan areas and the surrounding open space, whether farmland, wildlife habitat or recreation land. Here are three examples of changing attitudes, new approaches and the emergence of powerful alliances at the county level.

## Ventura County

Ventura County has approximately 113,000 acres of irrigated agriculture and is converting about 1,100 acres per year to urban uses. This trend could lead to collapse of the county's agricultural industry within a few decades (see *Linkages* issue number 4.) The existing system of orderly development and voluntary greenbelts around cities is failing to prevent significant farmland loss. But over the last couple of years there have been major policy shifts by the County Farm Bureau and others, leading to broad support for strong farmland protection proposals.

The development of broad-based support for voter-approved urban growth boundaries began last year with an effort of a citizens' group attempting to place on the November ballot of the county and several cities initiatives entitled Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR). The "City SOAR" would require the establishment of a city urban growth boundary which could only be amended by a vote of the city's residents. The "County SOAR" would cover unincorporated areas and county land designated as agriculture or open space, and would require a vote of county residents to change such zoning. Interestingly, the group has convinced the city council of Oxnard, a city which in the past has rapidly expanded into agricultural land, to place the SOAR initiative on the city's November ballot.



At the same time as the SOAR initiatives were unfolding, an Agricultural Policy Working Group, established by the County Supervisors in 1997, has developed a farmland protection proposal that includes urban growth boundaries affirmed by voter referendum. The Working Group included three County Supervisors, as well representatives of the agricultural, business and environmental communities and city mayors. In seven town hall meetings across the county, it found overwhelming (85%) support by the public for strong farmland protection.

In May of this year, the Agricultural Policy Working Group reached consensus on two critical programs for protecting Ventura County farmland, which will be primary recommendations in its final report to the Board of Supervisors.

The first program is a procedure for the establishment of Urban Growth Boundaries. The group recommended that the County and cities adopt moratoria on applications to the Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO - see page 10) for amendments to city spheres of influence, effectively halting growth at these sphere boundaries. The moratoria would be in effect for 2 years, during which time LAFCO will complete sphere boundary studies. The new sphere boundaries would then be

adopted by the voters as Urban Growth Boundaries. These boundaries can only be changed once every ten years, and changes will require an affirmative vote of the electorate.

A second program recommends adoption by ordinance of the county's six greenbelts around cities, to replace the "gentlemen's agreements" status of current greenbelts, plus the adoption of five new greenbelts. Further, the group recommended adoption of new policies on allowed uses in agricultural and open space zones in the greenbelts, or as an alternative, the adoption of a greenbelt district.

The County Farm Bureau aided development of this consensus by making its own proposals for a growth control system that included urban growth boundaries affirmed by voter referendums. It called for a new land-use ethic that emphasizes preservation of agricultural and open space lands for the indefinite future, based on "the realization that the quality of life for all county residents is intimately tied to land preservation." It called for new development approaches, such as cluster zoning and pedestrian oriented development. This is a dramatic change from historical Ventura County Farm Bureau opposition to growth boundaries.

## Fresno County

Fresno County is currently the leading agricultural county in the nation, a position held by Los Angeles County only 50 years ago. But like Los Angeles in the late 1940's, Fresno County faces massive population growth. Current General Plan revision processes assume the county population will double by the year 2020, to about 1.5 million. The population estimate for 2040 is 2.5 million. In the past growth has occurred by low density sprawl in the Fresno-Clovis area, with many patches of weedy fields left behind in the haste to spread houses across the landscape. State Senator Jim Costa recently called the metro area "one of the best examples of how not to grow" Continuing this pattern to 2040 will convert over a quarter of a million acres (19%) of the county's irrigated farmland

In 1996 the Building Industry Association of the San Joaquin Valley, the Fresno County Farm Bureau, the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and the American Farmland Trust sent a letter to the City of Fresno calling for policies that would encourage compact growth and infill, including increases in the density of future development. Later these groups, plus the Fresno Business Council, formed the Growth Alternatives Alliance to promote alternative development patterns.

The Alliance issued a far-reaching report in April. *A Landscape of Choice: Strategies for Improving Patterns of Community Growth*, makes proposals that represent a major change in position by the building, business and agricultural sectors. It promotes a set of principles as

goals for the revised General Plan, together with specific policies and implementing policies. It calls for planning that conserves farmland and directs growth away from the most productive agricultural land, including the adoption

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## Fresno County business leaders call for compact residential development, as well as pedestrian and transit oriented growth

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of urban growth boundaries and multi-jurisdictional planning by the County and the cities. It calls for meeting housing needs through compact, and denser (6-8 dwellings units per acre), residential development. The Alliance calls for pedestrian and transit oriented development, stating "as the 21st Century approaches, we must begin to plan for a future in which the privately owned automobile is not the dominant feature in the landscape." In addition, the Alliance calls for infill development and utilization of a wide array of Livable Community principles (see Fall 1995 issue of *Linkages* for some key principles).

## Stanislaus County

In this County we see a different, but also encouraging, approach. County and City governments came together, under the leadership of county chief executive officer Reagan Wilson, to draft a broad vision statement on the future of Stanislaus County. Representatives of local governments prepared a draft vision document covering a wide variety of issues, from land use to economic development. Vision proposals include urban limit lines, sharing some revenue among local governments to end fiscalization of land use, and preserving river corridors.

This government vision process is reaching out to a wider audience, for example through presentation to business leaders and to an IEH regional growth issues workshop. The final version of the county vision will call on the cities and counties to adopt a range of policies and programs, so it is essential to obtain buy-in from all the communities.

*To obtain the Fresno Alliance report, contact the American Farmland Trust at (530) 753-1073, or download the report from the AFT web site: <http://www.farmland.org>*

# The Smart Growth Movement

by Harriet Tregoning

*Harriet Tregoning is Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Urban and Economic Development Division. This article, re-printed with permission, is abridged from one published in the Spring 1998 report of the Joint Center for Sustainable Communities.*

**M**ore and more, we are seeing the term *Smart Growth* in the press and reports about community projects. What does it mean and who's spurring the interest in it?

Smart Growth is a broad set of strategies that affect location decisions and site designs in a way that will minimize development's negative impacts on social, economic & environmental health. Communities can take many approaches to grow smarter.

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## **Smart Growth - strategies to minimize development's negative impacts on a community's social, economic and environmental health**

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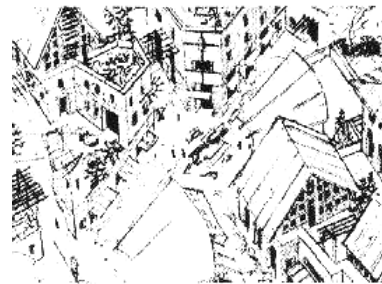
Redeveloping brownfields is one good example. Brownfields are abandoned or underutilized properties that have become virtual "dead zones" due to the fear of real or perceived environmental contamination. Currently, many communities are working to redevelop brownfield sites to improve public health and the economic competitiveness of these sites and surrounding neighborhoods. By targeting economic development in otherwise wasted brownfield areas, critical open spaces or greenfields are preserved in the outreaches of metropolitan areas. Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago are a few of the many cities that are cleaning up brownfield sites as a strategy for revitalizing their local economies and improving the quality of life for their residents.

Building eco-industrial parks is another example of smarter growth. Eco-industrial parks are an environmentally efficient version of industrial parks. They follow a systems design in which one facility's waste becomes another facility's feedstock, and they ensure that raw materials are recycled or disposed of efficiently and safely. The Port of Cape Charles Sustainable Technologies Industrial Park in Northampton County, VA, is one of four national prototype ecological industrial parks that currently is under construction.

Building code and zoning ordinances also can be powerful tools for smart growth, if used creatively. Building codes can shape how much energy, water and materials a building consumes in its construction and operation. Zoning ordinances influence decisions on the construction, design and siting of buildings and developments. They may be used to create neighborhoods which foster community by integrating uses or encouraging pedestrian trips. Building "green" and zoning for mixed-use development are ways local governments can implement smart growth principles.

Linking transportation, land use and economic growth is another technique that can lead to smarter growth. For example, in the Portland metropolitan area, communities are working together to handle the explosive population growth occurring since the 1980's. By coordinating public transportation decision-making and the establishment of its urban growth boundary, the area is conserving open space and prime farmland to preserve the quality of life that has attracted so many people to Portland in the first place.

Location-efficient mortgages are an emerging tool to encourage smarter growth. This type of mortgage would increase the borrowing power of potential home buyers in high-density locations with easy access to mass transit. A borrower would qualify for a larger loan based on expected higher disposable income from a reduction in, or absence of, automobile payments, insurance and maintenance. Currently a demonstration project is being set up to test the viability of such a financial instrument.



Eric Rowell

EPA's Smart Growth Network is designed to help bring together the information, resources, tools and partners to make smart growth happen. The network consists of members and partners. Members are architects, developers, planners, local officials, environmentalists, lenders, transportation planners, real estate investors and others who want to implement smart growth and access

network resources to do so. Public and private sector partners are the backbone of the Smart Growth Network, supplying ideas, doing research, producing publications and jointly sponsoring Network programs. Partners share information on the latest trends in smart construction and building material recycling techniques; learn about innovative financing for infill and brownfields redevelopment; access tools to evaluate competing development options; field test potentially money-saving investments that will reap economic and environmental benefits. The 14 partners range from the Joint Center for Sustainable Communities, to the Urban Land Institute, to the State of Maryland.

*For more information, check the Smart Growth web site: <http://www.smartgrowth.org> (see resources on page 12), or call EPA's Urban and Economic Development Division (202) 260-2750.*



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## New Leadership for Sustainable Land Use in California

*by Steve Sanders*

California's population boom is back. After years of recession and slow population growth, California has once again become a magnet for people across the U.S. and the world. According to the California Department of Finance, California is expected to grow by as many as 30 million new residents in the next 30 to 40 years. And while migration from other places is one cause of the boom, most of these new residents will be born to the people already here.

A number of recent reports -- from entities as diverse as the state's Little Hoover Commission, Bank of America, the Low Income Housing Fund, American Farmland Trust, Sierra Business Council, Greenbelt Alliance, and the California State Resources Agency -- predict that the consequences of future growth may outstrip anything California has seen before. This extraordinary growth raises questions about how California will respond:

- Will the current "rules of the game" -- the taxing, spending, land use and infrastructure investment policies now in play at the local, regional and state levels -- enable California to grow equitably and efficiently?
- Will California be able to sustain its economic vitality without destroying its natural heritage and world-renowned quality of life?

As a new century approaches, respected voices for business, agriculture, local government, urban

constituencies and the environment agree that the answer to both of these questions is "no". The current rules in California are grossly inadequate to accommodate the projected increases in population without undercutting the state's economic prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental quality.

With California's economy rebounding and state tax revenues growing rapidly, this is an opportune time to address the issues of growth and sustainable land use. But there is a leadership vacuum at the state level on land use and growth management. California -- which once prided itself as being a leader in planning ahead for future generations -- has fallen behind states from all around the country in setting a positive policy agenda for sustainable land use.

Next January a new governor will take office. The legislature elected this year will be made up overwhelmingly of individuals who never held state office prior to 1994. There will be a real need -- and a golden opportunity -- to educate and inform the new governor and his administration, new legislators and other policy makers and opinion leaders around the state about a range of issues related to sustainable land use and growth management.

In recognition of this fact, the California Futures Network this year is carrying out a "New Leadership Project" with the generous support of the Hewlett and Irvine Foundations. The project will work over the coming year to



develop a broad political and civic coalition to promote sustainable land use policies among this new generation of policy makers.

The stakes couldn't be higher. Just recently, the Southern California Association of Governments issued a forecast that the population of the Southern California region will increase by 43 percent by the year 2020, to a total of 22.35 million residents in Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. The rest of the state is expected to grow as well, especially the small towns and cities in the farmlands of the great Central Valley.

At the same time, Californians are converting more land resources on a per capita basis to build new housing, commercial and retail developments. For example, in the Los Angeles metropolitan area between 1970 and 1990, population grew by 45 percent, but land coverage of the built environment grew by 200 percent.

In contrast, Portland, Oregon, with one of the most long-standing and successful growth management programs in the nation, has managed to keep growth in area in synch

with population growth. By containing low-density sprawl, Portland has become one of the most attractive and successful metropolitan regions in the country.

Can California policy makers learn from Portland and other regions that have succeeded at balancing growth with economic prosperity, social equity and a clean environment? The New Leadership Project aims to find out. We will engage a broad array of community and civic leaders throughout the state to develop effective land use and fiscal reforms that will strengthen our economy and the fiscal health of local communities, protect the environment, and preserve the quality of life of our neighborhoods.

This is an ambitious effort, but a vital one if we are to meet the challenge of California's growth. To find out how you can participate, check [www.calutures.org](http://www.calutures.org)

*Steve Sanders is Director of the California Futures Network, a statewide coalition of urban, environmental, housing, social justice, local and tribal governments, labor, business and agricultural interests established to promote sustainable land use in California. The Institute for Ecological Health is an affiliate of the network.*

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## The Role of LAFCOs in California's Growth

*By Ron Bottorff*

**W**alk down your neighborhood street and ask 100 people what they know about their Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO.

Unless yours is an unusual community, you will be lucky if more than one or two can tell you what it is or has a good concept of what it does. Yet, California has 57 LAFCOs, one for each county in the state, with the basic responsibility of ruling on city boundary expansion and assuring appropriate services are provided as cities grow.

Given the fact that California's population is projected to roughly double in the next several decades, LAFCOs will play a very important role in the way future growth is distributed and how California will look at the end of this period. It is important for California's future that these sometimes-obscure bodies be better understood and given more scrutiny by the public and the media.

### The Origin of LAFCOs

LAFCOs came about as California attempted to cope with the tremendous growth in the state's population following World War II. This growth not only involved large numbers, but also involved a significant increase in the percentage of people living in urban regions such as Southern California and the Bay Area. There was a

general lack of growth coordination among cities, districts, counties, and state agencies. Annexation wars were occurring between some cities as each tried to position itself to attract the most housing tracts to generate property tax revenue.

Something had to be done. In 1959, Governor Pat Brown set up a blue-ribbon Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems. The Commission's final report found that growth-generated problems exceeded the capacities of individual governments to solve. It recommended that a State Metropolitan Area Commission, essentially a statewide LAFCO, be established.

In the report and subsequent legislation that was carried, the cities and counties opposed this state-centralized Commission as counter to California's long tradition of home rule in local government. As a compromise, the 1963 Knox-Nisbet Act set up a locally-appointed LAFCO in each county to serve as a boundary commission. There-after, any city annexation, incorporation, or other boundary change was subject to LAFCO approval after a public hearing. In 1985, the legislature consolidated the various sections of law pertaining to LAFCO powers in the Government Code into the Cortese-Knox Local Government Reorganization Act.

## How LAFCOs Work

LAFCOs, which usually meet on a regular monthly basis, are made up of either 5 or 7 representatives. Two are members of the county Board of Supervisors, termed the "county members", two are from city councils, termed the "city members", and one is from the general public, termed the "public member". Since 1970, LAFCOs may, if they choose, include two members elected by special districts, termed the "special district members". Each LAFCO has an executive director who does the actual processing of applications, sees that they meet legal requirements, and recommends to the Commission as to whether a given application merits approval.

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### **“The statutory goals of LAFCO ... are to discourage urban sprawl or conversely to encourage preservation of agricultural land and open space”**

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The statutory goals of LAFCO are quite clear: to discourage urban sprawl or conversely to encourage preservation of agricultural land and open space through orderly formation of local agencies such as cities and special districts. LAFCOs do this primarily by

establishing and periodically revising city boundaries through annexation approvals and corresponding special district boundary change approvals (special districts supply such services as water, sewer, fire protection, etc.) A common misconception is that LAFCOs have land-use authority but, in fact, they do not. Zoning authority, which controls the actual uses of land, is left to county super-visors and city councils via General Plans. LAFCO decisions involve boundary placement only.

LAFCOs have responsibility for establishing each jurisdiction's "sphere of influence". In the case of a city, the sphere is generally defined as its "probable ultimate boundary". Cities, however, may periodically apply for amended spheres of influence as, over time, land within their sphere is annexed and developed. Land to be annexed must lie within a jurisdiction's sphere of influence before LAFCO will process an application for annexation.

In practice, LAFCOs around the state have wielded broad and flexible authority under the sometimes-ambiguous Cortese-Knox governing structure. Differences in local preferences and political circumstances lead to much variation from county to county. Some LAFCOs have adopted additional standards beyond Cortese-Knox to control the way in which growth should occur. Ventura County provides a good example, where a set of Guidelines for Orderly Development have been adopted by LAFCO, the county and its 10 cities. These guidelines maintain the consistent theme that urban development be located within incorporated cities whenever and wherever practical. Ventura LAFCO is generally considered one of the state's most well-run and effective.

*Ron Bottorff is Secretary of the Institute for Ecological Health. He has just completed a four-year term as alternate and full public member of the Ventura Local Agency Formation Commission.*

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## **Review : Growth Management in America**

### ***Managing Growth in America's Communities***

By Douglas Porter.  
Island Press. 1997 \$29.95 (paper)  
*Reviewed by John Hopkins*

Douglas Porter provides us with an unbiased overview of Growth Management in the United States, focusing on a series of basic issues and providing a wealth of examples and success stories. As president of the Maryland-based Growth Management Institute, he is well positioned to provide this comprehensive overview from the viewpoint that growth will occur but we can manage how we build communities and pattern development across the landscape.

Mr. Porter includes a very helpful overview of the legal underpinnings of local government land use planning, both to ensure quality and functionality of our communities and to protect other land based resources from development. He explains how the courts "have consistently upheld the right of local governments to regulate land use". He reminds us that local government may "legally curtail or prohibit development to preserve such features as flood- plains, wetlands, sand dunes, and habitat of endangered species." But regulation must be based on legitimate public interests and proper processes, and the courts continue to refine the balance between private interest and public good. Most of *Managing Growth* addresses how the nation is

trying to cope with the flood of sprawl style growth that spread across the country after World War II. Infrastructure needs, protection of community character and conservation of natural resources are key issues. Eric Kelly sums up the problem in his description of 1950's growth in Nassau County, Long Island as "an unrelieved pattern of low-density, single family homes, shopping center sprawl, and haphazardly sited business, industry and entertainment. Once-blue bays are polluted; once-common shellfish have disappeared; wetlands are bulkheaded and beaches are eroded; in many areas open space is virtually gone." Unfortunately this pattern of growth is all too common.

Land conservation approaches include restrictions on the number of new housing units per year (Petaluma, 1972), urban limit lines (Oregon), infrastructure requirements (Montgomery County, Maryland) and very large minimal parcel sizes for agricultural land (McHenry County, Illinois.) There are an array of methods to define or channel how development occurs, from cluster requirements to overlay zoning that mandates additional restrictions for certain features, to exclusionary zoning that mandates such requirements as affordable housing, to incentives aiding revitalizing of aging downtowns, to compact neotraditional development. Porter examines these with illuminating analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

The bottom line is that there is no simple, single, solution to a community's growth problems or to protection of natural resources. Rather, it is necessary to use a set of tools, and to have a strong focus on how communities function. "Bitter experience tells us that the grand

strategies of growth management such as urban boundaries, conservation of rural land, coordinated provision of infrastructure, and promotion of infill and redevelopment can only succeed if detailed attention is paid to maintaining and enhancing the quality of existing and emerging neighborhoods and community centers," writes Porter. Many of us view approaches like neotraditional development and urban villages as essential to producing people-centered communities with a high quality of life, rather than sprawling, auto-centered communities. Porter considers these approaches, while noting opposing economic trends like "big-box" retail stores. He states that design approaches "must work in conjunction with the development marketplace."

And while regional government is not in vogue, an absence of regional overviews and management of growth can undo the best intentions of localities. Boulder Colorado, for example, has managed its growth well. But surrounding areas have not, so Boulder faces a sea of sprawl development beyond its boundaries. Also regional approaches are essential for biologically effective habitat conservation and the protection of ecological health. Porter examines the difficulties facing regionalism and makes a series of recommendations for effective regional growth management.

In conclusion, Douglas Porter provides an extremely valuable book for all those concerned with how we address the challenges of growth. He provides a broad understanding of the varied approaches across the country, their strengths & weaknesses, giving individuals a firm basis for approaching their local and regional growth problems

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## Information Resources

### National

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***Developing a Vision for Your Area***  
By Rudy Platzek, Valley Vision Project  
Prepared for an IEH workshop, 1997

For a number of years Rudy Platzek, founder of the Ceres-based Valley Vision Project, has called attention to the loss of Central Valley farmland (see map of under existing trends in *Linkages* issue #2).

Rudy also promotes the idea of citizens coming together and creating a vision for their region. He explored this concept at an Institute for Ecological Health regional workshop held in Fresno County last November and prepared a detailed explanatory document, *Developing a Vision for your Area*, for that occasion. In this pamphlet

Rudy explains the nature and need for visioning. It is a way for communities to develop a broad supported picture of how they wish to be 50 or more years from now, and to explore how to reach the long-term vision. He provides a basic, 4- step, vision process : profile the existing community region, analyze current trends, create the vision and develop an action plan.. There is information on the necessary groundwork, types of process and examples.

A draft vision for the northern San Joaquin Valley prepared by Rudy and others uses this approach. It includes the idea of community foodbelts around each city in the region. These foodbelts would provide an urban boundary area by being permanent agricultural land. With the growth of farmer's markets, community-

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baseand grocery stores' interest in fresh local produce, community foodbelts could provide a strong connection between urban dwellers and the land that provides their food. This in turn would help build urban understanding of farmers' issues and needs and so develop a larger constituency for an economically viable agricultural industry. Reality is complex. The development of food production for local markets will occur according to individual farmer's interests and needs, and only be one

function of community foodbelt areas. For example, Central valley agriculture provides food for people across America and exports a large fraction of its products to other countries. The export function will remain vital to Central Valley agriculture, including many farms within community foodbelts.

*To obtain this document, send \$3 to IEH, 409 Jardin Place, Davis, CA 95616. For information on the Valley Vision Project, contact Rudy Platzek at (209) 537-8838.*

### Two Sustainable Community Web sites

There are two excellent Web sites for Internet users to obtain information on a wide range of sustainability issues. Both provide links to other organizations and information sources.

"<http://www.smartgrowth.org>" provides information on the Smart growth Network (see page 7), including design and sprawl issues.

"<http://www.sustainable.org>" is the home page of the Sustainable Communities Network. This is a source of Web information and links for everything from natural resource protection to local government policies and ordinances and community indicators.

### Back Issues of *Linkages* Available

Most articles in each issue focus on a single topic: Conservation Planning (Fall 1997), Flood Management (Spring 1997), Sierra Foothills (Fall 1996), Central Valley (Spring 1996).

Single copies are \$2, free with payment of a new IEH membership. From: IEH, 409 Jardin Place, Davis, CA 95616

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