



GRAPPLING WITH GROWTH : SOLUTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By John Hopkins

California faces rapid population growth in the first half of the 21st Century. The state's Department of Finance predicts that some areas will double their population by 2020. Much of the growth in recent decades has occurred through low-density development, consuming land much faster than the population grows. Continuing this trend will create vast mega-cities and result in huge economic, social and environmental problems.

In the Central Valley, current trends will lead to a "linear city that eventually will string out from Bakersfield to Sacramento, held together by the sinew of Highway 99," in the words of Bee columnist Peter King. The Inland Empire of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, facing a population doubling by 2020, is another area that would be especially impacted.

The summer 1998 issue of *Linkages* detailed two of these efforts. In Silicon Valley the Manufacturers Group, in coalition with the building industry and environmental organizations, champions infill development projects. It also pursues more funding for transit and supports urban growth boundaries. In Fresno County, the Business Council, Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau and Building Industry Association joined the American Farmland Trust in calling for compact development that provides for transit and pedestrians. Communities are adopting voter-controlled growth boundaries. The California Futures Network, a broad-based organization, is rapidly building support for state-level land use reform.

	1996	2020	+ %
San Diego Co.	2.7	3.9	43
Los Angeles / Orange Co.	12.1	16.1	33
Inland Empire	3.0	6.0	101
San Joaquin Valley	3.1	5.8	87
San Francisco Bay Area	6.5	8.0	24
Sacramento Region	1.8	2.9	62

Source: Cal. Dept. of Finance (April 1997)

Some Solutions to Growth Problems

The causes of sprawl are complex, and we need to adopt an array of solutions. There are also different solutions for different situations - older suburbs, new suburban development, city cores and rural lands with scattered small towns all have different needs and solutions.

Extensive low-density development would result in dramatic loss of farmland and wildlife habitat, worsening traffic congestion and air pollution, higher infrastructure costs for local government, suburbs lacking a sense of community, and deterioration of older neighborhoods and urban areas. Fortunately, there are better ways to absorb the likely population growth, ways that provide a high quality of life for people while providing economic and social benefits and minimizing environmental impacts.

Livable communities, designed for people rather than automobiles, are one solution. This requires changing the layout of many new developments, as promoted by the New Urbanists and others. *(Continued on page 3)*

Momentum Building for Reform

In recent years business and agricultural groups have joined environmental and farmland conservation organizations in calling for changing growth patterns.

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News from IEH

The IEH Philosophy

IEH is a non-profit (501)(c)(3) organization with a small board of directors and staff and a growing membership. Our board includes a cattle rancher, a small business owner, a board member of a city chamber of commerce and a conservation leader. Our membership is also diverse, including farmers, ranchers, business people, planners, academics, conservationists, and citizen activists.

Our approach to land issues is to seek and promote solutions that meet the needs of both people and nature. We believe society will only solve the current conflicts by embracing a philosophy of stewardship, and by obtaining broad-based support for solutions that benefit multiple interests. So we focus on involving individuals from different backgrounds in our activities and play leadership roles in projects involving multiple interests. We consider a regional focus to be an essential component of land use analysis and problem solving.

Besides publishing *Linkages*, IEH activities include holding regional workshops, carrying out regional projects, participating in conservation planning, educating through presentations and panel discussions, and providing information on our Web site at San Francisco State University.

Great Valley Center Grant Underwrites this *Linkages*

This is the second issue of *Linkages* that is partially under-written by a generous LEGACI grant from the Great Valley Center.

Sierra Futures Fund Grant

The Sierra Nevada Alliance generously awarded IEH a grant to plan a traveling land use workshop. We have found that regional workshops in cities like Fresno and Sacramento do not attract many people from rural areas such as the Sierra Foothills, so we will develop a traveling workshop, with a number of different modules that allow tailoring of an individual workshop to a locality's needs.

Individual & Business Memberships - the Financial Basis of *Linkages*.

Thank you to all who have donated in the past. You represent a wide range of interests, including farmers, ranchers, business people, planners, scientists and conservationists. Your generous donations ensure that *Linkages* reaches a wide array of decision makers, newspaper reporters and community leaders, many of whom use *Linkages* as a valuable reference tool.

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

Contacting IEH

409 Jardin Place, Davis, CA 95616
(530) 756-6455 (phone and FAX)
E-mail: ieh@cal.net

Growth Solutions, *continued from page 1.*

At the neighborhood scale, livable communities have shops, restaurants, other amenities, and offices within walking or bicycling distance for most residents. They have people-friendly streets and greenbelts that invite walking and bicycling for a variety of errands. Designs include narrow residential streets, shops that front directly onto sidewalks instead of onto parking lots, as well as offices, apartments and condominiums above stores. The result is relatively compact suburban and urban villages, with less infrastructure per person and a real sense of community- a far cry from walled-off subdivisions connected to shopping centers and strip commercial areas by a few crowded arterial roads.

Designing developments so that people are not forced to use cars for every errand will not only reduce local traffic, but also improve air quality, as demonstrated by the California Air Resources Board. Most auto trips are not commutes, but travel to shops, schools, and other needs. The trips are usually short, and often with a cold engine where the pollution controls do not work efficiently.

“Another essential design feature is to include public places and spaces”

Another essential design feature is to include public places and spaces. There is a new trend to call shopping centers, with an array of stores surrounded by acres of asphalt, “town centers”. A real town or village center is a compact area with civic buildings - church, library, post office, community center - a plaza or other auto-free open space, and a mix of businesses.

A closeness to nature is very important for many people, and is not antithetical to compact development. Greenways, such as corridors of native vegetation along streams, and small natural reserves make nature accessible to suburb and city dwellers. Larger natural areas close to cities and dotted through metropolitan regions provide a wide variety of benefits.

Permanent conservation of important lands, for agriculture, wildlife habitat and open space for recreation and aesthetics is another fundamental solution. Communities & regions can achieve this by a mixture of fee acquisition and conservation and easements that buy development rights. Several Bay Area organizations, including the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, East Bay

Regional Parks District & Mid Peninsula Open Space District, show how to protect very extensive tracts of land over time.

Viable public transit at the city and metropolitan area scale, needs more compact development (see page 10.) Subdivisions at four houses per acre, shopping centers or business parks centered on huge parking lots, and strip commercial areas stymie public transit. In areas where there is little or no public transit, we have to think ahead & build for future transit viability, as the Fresno Business Council and others state in their forward-looking report.

Revitalization of older suburbs, downtowns and run-down commercial areas is another set of solutions. Infill development (see article on page 10) and major redevelopment projects help counter sprawl, provide housing near existing jobs and shopping areas, and revitalize urban areas. Downtown Plaza in Sacramento and Horton Plaza in San Diego are great assets to their urban cores and attract people beyond the 9-5 office day. The thriving main streets and squares of some smaller towns, such as Grass Valley in the Sierra Foothills and San Luis Obispo in the Central Coast, are vivid testimony to the importance and validity of a real downtown.

“We are jeopardizing our ability to attract and retain residents and businesses. In an increasingly footloose world, where people and jobs can locate anywhere, the choice is often whether an area can provide a desirable quality of life. And for many, that quality of life is defined by accessible green outdoor space, clean air and water, lower taxes and an easy commute”

Building a Metropolitan Greensward : New York - New Jersey - Connecticut Metropolitan Region. Regional Plan Association

Urban growth boundaries that provide for 20 or 30 years of growth and can only be changed by community vote, are a key solution. But they will only work over time if accompanied by changes in community design, infill development and other steps.

Long-term visions for communities and regions are a basic need. We explore this issue in detail on page 7.

Unless citizens decide what they want communities to be like in 50 years or so, and unless we address land conservation needs and growth/transportation dynamics at regional scales, we invite a continuation of urban sprawl.

Regions and subregions must achieve a jobs/housing balance to minimize long-distance impacts. Currently Bay Area workers seek affordable housing in the Central Valley, LA employees commute from the Inland Empire.

There are financial needs for many of these solutions. Developers will not build livable communities and infill projects unless they know their products will sell. Public transit and redevelopment projects need funding. Local government decisions must be based on good planning and long-term vision, not immediate needs for cash. Permanent land conservation usually needs funds for fee simple or conservation easement acquisition. Public-private partnerships, new sources of funding like Transfer of Development Rights (see following article), and changes in local incentives and disincentives are all needed.

Communities and regions must make major changes in the next few years to ensure that future growth does not jeopardize our quality of life and degrade our environment. But we also need state level reform. California has relinquished the lead to other states. Many governors, Democrat and Republican, realize that the

state plays a vital role in land use decisions. Reform of local government financing, creation of state level incentives and removal of barriers to compact development, as well as requirements for local planning and regional cooperation, are all long overdue. *John Hopkins is President of IEH*

Further Reading

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Managing Growth in America's Communities. Douglas Porter. Island Press (1997)

The Ecology of Place: Planning for Environment, Economy and Community. Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning. Island Press (1997)

The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community and the American Dream. Peter Calthorpe. Princeton Architectural Press (1993).

The Land Use - Air Quality Linkage: How Land Use and Transportation Affect Air Quality. California Air Resources Board (1994)

Land Use Strategies for more Livable Places. Local Government Commission (1992). 1414 K St., Suite 250, Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 448-1198.

A Landscape of Choice: Strategies for Improving Patterns of Community Growth. Fresno Business Council et.al. (1998) [Available on the Internet at: <http://farm.fic.niu.edu/fic/ft/landcal.html>]

Using Transfer of Development Rights to Put Growth Where It Belongs

By Rick Pruett

Most communities would like to save something. It might be environmentally-sensitive areas, farmland, historic landmarks, open space or any other place with special significance. But there is typically a dilemma. Elected officials are often reluctant to impose restrictive land use controls on property owners without providing some form of compensation, but most communities have little or no money for compensation.

Some communities address this dilemma with Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). This market-based technique encourages the voluntary transfer of growth from places where a community would like to see less development, called sending areas, to places where a community would like to see more development, called receiving areas. Development pays for preservation.

With TDR, a community motivates sending site owners to record permanent deed restrictions on their property, forever ensuring that the land will only be used for approved activities such as farming, nature study or passive recreation. When these deed-restrictions are recorded, transferable development rights, or TDRs, are created. Sending site owners are compensated for their reduced development potential by selling these TDRs to the developers of receiving sites.

In the receiving areas, a TDR-based zoning code offers developers a choice. Developers who decide *not* to buy TDRs are allowed less development on the receiving sites. But developers who purchase TDRs are allowed extra development, or bonus density. When a program is well designed, the extra revenues from higher-density projects make it more profitable for developers to use the

TDR option despite the extra cost of having to buy the development rights.

Not all TDR programs are successful. But when a community creates the components needed for a TDR market, everybody wins. Sending site owners are compensated for permanently preserving their properties. Receiving site developers enjoy greater returns even though they have to buy TDRs. And communities achieve their land use goals using private sector money rather than tax dollars.

If TDR is so Great, Why Doesn't Everyone use it?

As I learned by sending questionnaires to the 3,500 largest communities in the country, many people still consider TDR to be experimental. But, in fact, it is *not* a recent innovation. TDR has been in use for thirty years in the United States, dating back to the New York City Land-marks Preservation Law of 1968.



The New Jersey Pinelands program has saved over 12,000 acres to date under a comprehensive plan that allows transfers between 60 different municipalities within a one-million-acre planning area.

Nor is TDR untested. My survey uncovered 112 programs in 25 states across the country. Of these 112 programs, 47 are in cities, 30 in counties and 30 in towns; another five programs are multijurisdictional, allowing transfers between different municipalities. Not all of these pro-grams have permanently preserved as much land as Mont-gomery County, Maryland (29,000 acres), The New Jersey Pinelands (12,000 acres) or Calvert County, Maryland (5,000 acres). Nevertheless, these 112 programs alone have accounted for the preservation of over 51,000 acres of environmental/agricultural land as well as more than 39 historic landmarks.

How Does TDR Compare With Other Preservation Techniques?

The best combination of preservation techniques depends on the circumstances of the individual community. A community might achieve its land use goals using only acquisition if it has relatively little land to preserve and sufficient public support to adopt funding mechanisms to pay for outright acquisition. But elsewhere, acquisition might only achieve a fraction of a community's goals since the public would not approve the funding needed for outright acquisition of all land that needs to be preserved.

Many communities rely primarily on zoning. But, communities are often unable to impose truly effective land use controls without offering the affected property owners some compensation for the reduction in development potential. More importantly, zoning does not offer permanent protection. For example, many communities think they have safeguarded their rural areas with low density zoning only to find out that there are many people willing to buy ten-, twenty- and thirty-acre lots for their country estates, farmettes and ranchettes. In addition, as opposed to a recorded deed restriction, zoning can change from one election to the next, leaving preservation at the mercy of shifting political winds.

TDR is not the only way for development to pay for preservation. Communities can also impose development fees which can then be used for land acquisition. But complete reliance on this approach only preserves land after development occurs. Alternatively, communities can use the compensation provided by TDR sales to secure the adoption of strong land use restrictions. These restrictions discourage the development of sending sites until the sending sites are permanently deed restricted. In other words, preservation strategies should combine many tools, giving emphasis to the techniques that are best suited to the scope of the community's land use goals as

well as the willingness of the public to adopt aggressive regulations and funding mechanisms.

Success Factors

Successful programs typically encourage TDR sales by reducing the development potential of the sending sites through zoning restrictions, environmental regulations or farmland protection measures. These sending site restrictions promote transfers and help to protect the resources the communities want to save. The compensation offered by TDR often makes it politically possible for these sending site restrictions to be imposed at all.

Further Reading

Rick Preutz is author of the book *Saved by Development: Preserving Environmental Areas, Farmland and Historic Landmarks with Transfer of Development Rights* (Arje Press, 1997. 434 pages). This is a very comprehensive examination of Transfer of Development Rights programs in the U.S. It fully explains how to protect a wide range of amenities using a TDR program and compares TDR's with other conservation techniques. The explanations of how to create a successful program include a step by step guide, analysis of legal considerations, and reasons why more communities are not using this approach. Half of the book is an examination of many TDR programs around the country, all done with a uniform format of "background, process and program status."

Just as sending site owners need to be encouraged to sell their development rights, receiving site developers must be motivated to buy TDRs. Developers will only buy TDRs if they receive more profit from a project that uses TDR. Unfortunately, in many communities, developers are content with the density allowed without TDR. In addition, some communities offer alternative methods of increasing density. For example, clustering allows individual property owners to transfer density within a single parcel. Because no transactions are needed, property owners find clustering very attractive; but clustering often allows the development of land that ought to be preserved and, ironically, promotes the development of small urban enclaves in the middle of rural areas. Even worse, some communities simply rezone land for higher densities without requiring TDRs or any other form of preservation. Needless to say, a developer will not pay for extra density when the community gives it away for free.

Selecting Receiving Sites

In addition to motivating sales and purchases, the selection of the receiving areas is critical to the success of TDR programs. Many of the communities that adopted TDR programs over the past three decades do not have good receiving sites within their boundaries. Some programs have overcome this problem when one or more jurisdictions with good receiving sites voluntarily agree to accept rights transferred from sending sites in other jurisdictions. Such voluntary inter-jurisdictional transfers occur in Morgan Hill, California and Boulder County, Colorado. In other cases, the state governments have imposed TDR programs that require jurisdictions to accept development rights transferred from other jurisdictions. For example, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency oversees a watershed protection program involving transfers between six different communities in the states of California and Nevada.

Building Public Support

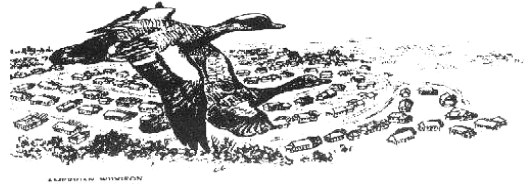
In addition to sending site owners and receiving site developers, the general public must accept the extra development proposed at the receiving sites. Community-wide, comprehensive planning efforts are ideal for generating this kind of acceptance. In the context of a comprehensive plan, the public is encouraged to identify areas that need additional development as well as areas that need to be preserved. Not surprisingly, the most successful TDR programs are in communities that specifically designed their comprehensive plans to be implemented through TDR.

“TDR can add optimism to the planning process”

Just as comprehensive planning can be good for TDR, TDR can be good for comprehensive planning. Communities often face a certain pessimism when confronted with overwhelming problems like urban sprawl. But TDR can add optimism to the planning process by offering a way for compensation to be funded without the use of tax dollars. This optimism can encourage the public to establish relatively aggressive land use goals. For example, in Monterey County, California, the process of preparing a TDR-based plan gave the general public a newfound appreciation for the unique beauty of the Big Sur coastline; as a result, scenic view restrictions were imposed that prohibit any new

development that would be visible from the Pacific Coast Highway. In other words, by addressing the dilemma of compensation, and the lack of public funding to provide that compensation, TDR lets people imagine the kind of communities that they would like to leave for future generations.

Rick Pruetz, AICP, is the City Planner of Burbank, California. and an IEH member. xx



Curbing Sprawl: a Need for Vision and a Regional Perspective

An underlying cause of urban and suburban sprawl is a lack of vision. Local governments and regional agencies rarely have a vision for growth that is supported by area residents and which incorporates an array of solutions to ensure a high quality of life and allow conservation of rural lands.

A Vision for the Future

Planner Rudy Platzek of the Valley Vision Project explains the visioning process in a document he prepared for an Institute for Ecological Health workshop last year. The Valley Vision Project analyzes urban growth and loss of farmland in the Central Valley, publicizing the problems and promoting farmland conservation. Rudy recognizes that communities need a vision in order to achieve this land conservation.

This visioning process utilizes four steps, based on the experience of several communities. Where are we now? Where are we going? Where do we want to be? How do we get there? “

A vision is the overall image of what the community wants to be and how it wants to look at some point in the future,” he writes. A vision statement is a formal expression of that vision. It depicts in words and images (maps and sketches) what the community is striving to become. It articulates a big picture view to guide short-term decisions and long-term initiatives. It is the starting point for the creation and implementation of action plans, which are the tools to achieve the vision.”

We Need a Regional Perspective

A regional vision for the future provides a framework for individual cities and communities. It deals with the big

picture in a geographically comprehensive way. Transportation, air quality, conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem health, and the distribution of new development are all growth-related issues that need an approach which is regional and integrated. Without the regional vision we create traffic congestion through poor land use planning, lose biologically critical areas and pave over large areas of important farmland - all through a series of small, local actions that seem innocuous.

“Regions are the critical geographic area for organizing land use decisions”

Steven Levy, director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy in Palo Alto, just prepared a report on Land Use and the California Economy for the Californians and the Land project. The report focuses on land use approaches that combine economic growth with a high quality of life. The first conclusion - “regions are the critical geographic area for organizing land use decisions in California. Residents and business leaders cannot assess the impact of local land use decisions without a regional perspective. Planning for adequate land for housing, jobs, preservation of unique land resources and open space requires a regional perspective.”

Looking 50 Years Ahead

It is important to think long-term. How you deal with a doubling of the regional population over 50 years is a different issue to ten years worth of growth. Over the short run, growth by low density development of farmland and natural lands can seem tolerable, but over the long run it will cause huge problems & cause a

deterioration in the quality of life. Thinking fifty years ahead forces leaders and the public to address the major changes we face.

A land use Future Vision is “ a conceptual statement that indicates populations levels and settlement patterns that the region can accommodate within the carrying capacity of the land, water and air resources of the region. The Future Vision is a long-term, visionary outlook for at least a 50-year period. The matters addressed by the Future Vision include (1) use, restoration and preservation of regional land and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, (2) how and where to accommodate the population growth for the region while maintaining a desired quality of life, and (3) how to develop new communities and additions to the existing urban areas in well-planned ways.” (From the voter-approved Charter for Metro, the regional planning authority of Portland, Oregon.)

Some Regional Approaches

Southeast Florida provides one regional example. Here rapid suburban development threatens the health of the Everglades ecosystem and leads to deterioration of older urban areas along the south-east coast. In 1995, the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida stated that “what is left of the Everglades must be preserved and rehabilitated”, with development redirected toward the existing urban corridor to the east. This led to the *Eastward Ho!* Initiative, which “is intended to be the engine to promote mixed-use development, help governments fund new and expanded infrastructure, stimulate infill development/ redevelopment, encourage moderately higher urban densities, increase varieties of housing and improve housing affordability in the tri-county region” (South Florida Regional Planning Council).

The three-county Denver, Colorado, area provides an example of a regional government vision coupled with voluntary implementation by local government. The Denver Regional Council of Governments (RCOG) spent five years developing a Metro 2020 Vision for accommodating expected growth. It began with a multi-stakeholder task force that established a set of principles and policies for transportation, land use and water. Then the RCOG prepared a preferred pattern of development. This includes a focus on transit-served urban centers, where there will be pedestrian-oriented development that is compact and mixed-use, and a regional open space system that includes buffers between communities. The early 1997 draft Vision was controversial because of the new 2020 urban boundaries. Cities like Boulder, with their own strong growth controls, felt

that the plan was not strong enough. Adams County, which wants its turn at rapid growth, and the NorthMetro Chamber of Commerce, felt the plan was too strict. Independence Institute commentator Carl Raschke called the Vision “an anti growth initiative.” Eventually local communities supported a final plan with a slightly larger area for growth. The plan provides for growth encompassing an additional 166 square miles (106,000 acres) to support an estimated 700,000 additional people. Without the Metro 2020 Vision, the expected expansion of all area cities to their comprehensive plan growth boundaries would utilize an additional 535 square miles (342,000 acres).

Portland, Oregon is the most well known regional approach. Here state land use law, including a requirement for urban growth boundaries, combines with a regional government, Metro, that has direct land use authority. Earlier this decade, Metro developed the Year 2040 Regional Framework Plan, a 45-year vision for the entire region. This includes very modest expansion of the regional urban limit line, with much of the growth accommodated by infill development and redevelopment. The plan addresses a wide variety of growth issues, from transportation, to development of people-friendly “main street” shopping areas, to conservation of natural areas within the urban boundary.

Lately there have been a number of articles critical of the Portland approach. However, the problems these articles present are not necessarily due to the planning items they attack. Two examples. Firstly, rapid increases in housing costs are blamed on the urban limit line, although that may have more to do with the strong economy and the attractiveness of the region. In California housing prices are surging in many of the fastest-growing job markets, irrespective of urban limit lines. Secondly, there is more sprawling growth across the river in Washington State counties. However, that just argues that a truly regional approach, irrespective of a state boundary, is necessary.

While the Portland approach inevitably has some problems, it is producing a more compact and very livable metropolitan area and the great majority of residents do not support massive expansion of the urban boundary. A bigger issue is that the Portland approach utilizes regional government with land use authority, something that seems very unlikely in states like California.

Several regional approaches to land use originate in non

profit organizations or the private sector, rather than in regional government entities or government run commissions.

“Only a clear, strong, positive vision can ensure that the region is livable, prosperous, equitable and sustainable”

In the tri-state New York Metropolitan Area the Regional Plan Association has prepared and promoted regional plans for a 31 county area since 1932. The First Plan in 1929 provided the blueprint for today’s transportation and open space networks. The Third Plan, released in 1996, “presents a broad vision for making the entire region more competitive in today's demanding global economy.” Its five campaigns include *Building a Metropolitan Greensward*. Proposals include establishing eleven very large regional reserves, where economic development should be built around natural resources and landscape values, and building a network of Greenways. A separate campaign calls for directing growth into centers to curb sprawl

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Urban Ecology developed its own vision and implementing proposals in the influential *Blueprint for a Sustainable Bay Area*, published in 1996. This very high quality document addresses the problems of the growth facing the nine-county San Francisco Bay region, where the urbanized area could double over the next 30 years if current trends continue. Sprawl, coupled with worsening traffic congestion, very high housing costs, and a lessening sense of community, threatens the well-being of this region and the neighboring Central Valley. Stating that “only a clear, strong, positive vision can ensure that the region is livable, prosperous, equitable and sustainable”, the *Blueprint* lays out how to achieve sustainable development, with a wealth of ideas and success stories.

In the six-county Sacramento Region, a private-sector led Green Valley Initiative is addressing the need to protect farmland, wildlife habitat and accessible open space for people over the long-term. This beginning effort will provide some components of a vision, such as important criteria for greenspace conservation, and build broad support for land conservation. It will involve all

major stakeholders. The Green Valley Initiative arose out of concerns in the growing High Tech industry that the region protect quality of life in order to attract and keep excellent employees. All types of open space are an important part of this quality of life. In addition, the agricultural sector seeks farmland conservation.

Regional approaches to a land use vision provide the essential framework for local decision making. In the absence of regional government with land use authority, there are a variety of ways to meet parts of this need, or even an integrated vision as with the Denver RCOG. Building a broad base of support, developing local implementation mechanisms, and providing for differences in geography and culture across a region, are all important steps to implementing that vision.

California is lagging behind many other areas of the US. We need to learn from the experience of others and move vigorously to develop regional visions for the future and effective implementation tools.

Further Information

Developing a Vision for Your Area

Rudy Platzek. (1997)
(\$3 from IEH)

Blueprint for a Sustainable Bay Area

Urban Ecology Inc. (1996)
(510) 251-6330

Land Use and the California Economy

Steven Levy, CCSCE (1998)
Californians and the Land
(415) 777-0487.

2040 Regional Framework Plan(1995)

Metro, Portland, OR.
(503) 797-1700. On the Internet at:
<http://www.metro.dst.or.us/growth/tfplan/framsum.html>

Denver Metro Vision 2020

Denver Regional Council of Governments
2480 W 26th Ave., Suite 200B
Denver, CO 80211. On the Internet at:
http://www.drcog.org/reg_plan/metro.html

South Florida's Eastward Ho! On the Internet at:

<http://www.sfrpc.com/current/ehowhat.htm>

Building a Metropolitan Greensward (NY-NJ-CT

Metro Area). Regional Plan Association. 1-800-828-1302 or on the Internet at <http://www.rpa.org>

Building Livable Communities - The Role of Infill Development

Infill development is the construction of buildings on vacant or disused pieces of land within an existing community. Many metropolitan areas have small to large patches of weedy land that were “left behind” as development spread across the landscape. Also older shopping centers and strip commercial areas that have failed provide an opportunity for land recycling.

Infill development “contributes to a healthy mix of uses that provides added vitality and convenience for residents” (Municipal Research & Services Ctr, State of WA.) It is essential for accommodating growth while minimizing sprawl development and maintaining urban boundaries.

There is increasing interest and support for infill development, particularly as successful projects demonstrate its feasibility and overcome real and perceived barriers. In the city of Sacramento attitudes to infill development are changing rapidly, thanks to a single successful project. In the spring of 1998 the 45-home Metro Square project sold out as soon as it went on the market, and there was a long waiting list for purchasing the model homes. Metro Square houses are compact single family homes on very small lots, in an attractive mid-town area with nearby shops, restaurants and a park. These homes are appealing to people who work downtown, want to avoid long commutes, and appreciate the amenities of an urban area. Metro Square’s success is changing attitudes and several more mid-town infill projects are in the works.

Another approach is construction of mixed-use developments in failed shopping areas. One example is The Crossings in Mountain View, Santa Clara County. Here a mix of single family and townhouses and apartments replaced a failed regional shopping mall next to a train station. The 18 acre project designed by Peter Calthorpe provides homes for 1,000 people and has three parks and a day care facility, as well as a pre-existing grocery store.

Some Benefits of Infill

Reduce the shortage of housing near jobs. Long commutes and a severe jobs/housing imbalance are an increasing problem in metropolitan areas. In the last issue of *Linkages* we saw how a business organization, the building industry and environmentalists banded together to promote infill development projects in the Silicon

Valley. The lack of affordable housing in Silicon Valley results in people buying homes as far away as Modesto, then spending several hours commuting each day. Housing tracts spread across the Inland Empire of Riverside and San Bernardino County, because of insufficient affordable housing for jobs in Los Angeles and Orange Counties (*The Housing Crunch*, LA Times, Aug 30th, 1998). Infill housing developments can partially solve the problem.

Reduce the need for new development at the urban fringe. Cities like Fresno have large vacant tracts, filled with weeds and surrounded by recent development. Compact infill projects on these sites will reduce the extent of sprawl development, conserving farmland and wildlife habitat.

“Viable public transportation requires higher densities of housing or commercial buildings around transit stops”

Increase the viability of transit lines. Viable public transportation requires higher densities of housing or commercial buildings around transit stops. People will only use transit when it is convenient - meaning frequent service, routes that take them where they want to go, and no need to walk far. The light rail systems in cities like Sacramento and San Diego are popular, but need compact development around the transit stops to increase ridership. A frequent bus service also needs fairly dense development. The California Air Resources Board estimates that residential development needs to be at least 4 to 6 units/acre to support one bus an hour. A half hourly bus service needs at least 7-8 units/acre, light rail with feeder buses at least 9 units/acre. But many housing subdivisions are 4 or less units to the acre.

Infill projects often provide the opportunity to increase residential or commercial density around existing or potential transit stops. “The most successful rail systems in the world (Stockholm, Toronto, Singapore) are those in which houses, offices and meeting places have grown up around the rail stations,” said Michael Bernick and Ed

McSpedon. "Land development has followed transit alignments and stations, and people are able to walk to and from the stations." [Sacramento Bee, August 1998]

Increase the livability of urban and suburban areas. Infill development that puts more people near shops, restaurants and other amenities increases the liveliness of an area and the economic viability of the businesses. Moderate and high-density housing projects like Metro Square fill this need well, as do projects that include stores and cafes. Recent developments are often a sea of homes with scattered shopping centers occupied by chain stores, lacking a sense of community, of a real neighborhood. Infill projects can provide neighborhood centers with a Main Street flavor, including the presence of civic building and public places.

Overcoming Obstacles to Infill Development

Infill is viewed as a financial risk. Developers shy away from infill housing projects because they do not know if the homes will sell. Banks are unwilling to lend money to builders for the same reason. New subdivisions on the urban fringe, in contrast, are known to sell and so are more acceptable to developers and banks. Infill projects need public subsidies and public-private partnerships at the moment, partly to reduce risk to a level the developer will accept. Successful projects like Metro Square demonstrate a market exists for the homes, making future projects easier to finance, and reducing the need for public support.

Financing favors urban fringe development. Land is cheaper at the urban fringe, and even cheaper when land speculators buy up rural land for development many years in the future. In addition, costs of extending urban services into fringe lands are often borne by taxpayers from the whole community. Local government actions, such as the tiering of areas receiving public dollars for capital improvements can help even the playing field for infill development.

Neighbors often oppose infill projects. An infill project, especially a high density project, sounds alarm bells of traffic congestion and falling property values. Working with neighboring residents from the beginning, fully involving them in project design by hands-on workshops, and meeting their needs is an essential component of a successful infill project. Infill projects must be of high quality and enrich the neighborhood, through attractive design, provision of needed services,

and other benefits. Developing a community long-term vision that addresses growth and stresses improving quality of life helps provide context for infill projects and shows how they can improve neighborhoods.

Local government regulations & attitudes. These are usually biased to urban fringe development. Across the West, local governments continue to approve new auto-dependent and land-hungry subdivisions, while paying scant attention to infill possibilities. Local zoning, general plans and codes often favor this sprawl style of development, and disfavor infill projects. Development on small lots, lack of setbacks and other features that are very desirable for an urban neighborhood are often prohibited. The Growth Alternatives Alliance, a Fresno County business and agriculture group, calls on local government to "provide strong leadership for developing policies and programs that create incentives for infill development and redevelopment." Example regulatory changes are: allowing very small lots in particular zones for single family and town houses that meet a set of infill guidelines; reducing parking requirements for commercial structures; allowing narrow streets in the larger infill developments.

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These and other obstacles to infill development can be overcome. Local government must be committed to promote infill development, business and citizen's groups must support infill and encourage local government action. Many communities could improve the livability of urban cores and existing communities, as well as reduce development pressure on urban fringe lands, by adopting comprehensive programs with public-private partnerships to promote infill.

Further Reading

Infill Development - Strategies for Shaping Livable Neighborhoods. Report No. 38 - June 1997
Municipal Research & Services Center, State of Washington. (Available on the Internet at <http://www.mrsc.org/textfill.htm>)

Building Livable Communities: a Policymaker's Guide to Infill Development. (1995) Local Government Commission (1995). 1414 K St., Suite 250, Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 448-1198.

Building Transit Friendly Communities. Regional Plan Assn (New York) (1997). 1-800-828-1302 or on the Internet at <http://www.rpa.org>

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Information Resources

Report of the Agricultural Task Force for Resource Conservation and Economic Growth in the Central Valley. July 1998.

For years the agricultural community has been split on how to deal with urbanization in California's Central Valley. Some farmers want to curb sprawl and save important farmland, while others need to sell their land for more than

farm value in order to provide a retirement income. For 18 months a task force of agricultural leaders, led by Jack Pandol and Mike Chrisman, discussed the issue and obtained agreement on ten principles among a number of major organizations. The 10 principles represent the Agricultural Community's position on urbanization and farmland in the Valley. They include:

- " use of agricultural conservation strategies, including conservation easements and enforcably restricted lands to provide incentives for landowners;
- " policies that ensure an adequate and affordable water supply for agriculture;
- " reform of local government financing to end the fiscalization of land use;
- " policies to encourage city-centered development, including infill, higher density development, and revitalization of existing urban areas.

This is an important document for all concerned about growth in the Central Valley, whatever their primary interest. You can download the report on the Internet at: <http://www.cfbf.com/agtask.htm>. You can obtain a hard copy from the California Farm Bureau Federation at (916) 561-5677.

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