

NORTHERN NEWS



American Planning Association
California Chapter
Northern
Making Great Communities Happen

A Publication of the Northern Section of the California Chapter of APA

May 2014

FEATURE ARTICLE

Smart Growth America honors Bay Area cities

Peter Costa, AICP, PTP

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Pedro Point, San Mateo County, Looking north from below the Old Coast Highway trail at Devil's Slide.
Photo: Mike Enderby, April 2014



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MAY 2014

Bay Area cities honored for complete streets and connectedness

Smart Growth America, a nationally recognized research and advocacy organization, recently released two reports: “Best Complete Streets Policies of 2013” (issued February 2014) and “Measuring Sprawl 2014” (issued in April). Based on the research findings in both reports, the San Francisco Bay Area and several of its communities can be proud of their accomplishments in enacting integrated transportation policies and promoting sustainable development practices.

Complete Streets

This report ranked the top 15 communities in the nation for creating comprehensive Complete Streets policies and integrating them into existing policy documents. Oakland placed 10th, and the cities of Hayward and Livermore tied for 11th. (First place went to Littleton, Massachusetts, 30 miles northwest of Boston.) Eighty-three states, cities, counties, and metropolitan areas implemented Complete Streets policies in 2013, bringing the total to 610 jurisdictions nationwide that have enacted Complete Streets policies. Only 31 jurisdictions had such policies in 2005.

In brief, Complete Streets policies look beyond simply reconstructing a street to accommodate various modes of transportation. The crux of these policies is to create streets that are safe for all types of users, of all ages and abilities. As expressed by the National Complete Streets Coalition (a program of Smart Growth America), these policies have been — and continue to be used as — toolkits to direct decision-makers in funding, planning, designing, constructing, operating, and maintaining community streets for all users.



Peter Costa, AICP, PTP

The number of Complete Streets policies adopted by jurisdictions is on the rise, as more policies increasingly cover more types of users and travel modes. At the same time, Complete Streets policy planning is becoming more robust and comprehensive, and communities are taking the appropriate steps to provide a clear path forward after policy adoption.

Measuring Sprawl

Since 2010, Smart Growth America has researched and analyzed development patterns in 221 metropolitan areas and 994 counties throughout the United States. The purpose of this nascent research is to further investigate and support evidence that individuals in compact, connected metropolitan areas have a greater probability of achieving upward “economic mobility.” That is, individuals living in compact metro areas spend less on the combined cost of housing and transportation. They also tend to live longer, safer, and healthier lives than do individuals in sprawling metro areas.

Researchers evaluated four factors to make such a determination: 1) development density, 2) land use mix,

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'Do-It-Yourself' Toolkit enhances community sustainability while residents lower their utility bills

By Emy Mendoza

Changing resource behavior — by making change easy and desirable — is the underlying principle of a new Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Home Energy Saving Toolkit provided by Silicon Valley Energy Watch and now available to the public through libraries in Santa Clara County. PG&E funds “energy watch programs” throughout its service area to promote energy conservation. Silicon Valley Energy Watch is such a program in Santa Clara County, with the City of San José serving as the program’s countywide administrator.

Just like a book, DIY Toolkits can be checked out for up to two weeks by anyone with a valid library card. Users can install the supplies and then return the toolkit and installation devices. The toolkits include an illustrated user guide that provides step-by-step instructions on how to measure the energy use and water flow rates of appliances and equipment, along with instructions on how to install equipment that reduces energy and water consumption.

Toolkit users get to keep four compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), three faucet aerators, a low-flow showerhead, outlet gaskets, weather stripping, and water leak detection tablets. Devices that enable the measurement of energy and water use are to be returned to the library in the toolkit box. They include:

- A Kill-A-Watt® Meter for measuring the energy use of appliances and equipment.
- A thermal detector that checks for heat loss through windows, vents, and doors.
- A special thermometer that helps set refrigerators and freezers to appropriate temperatures.
- A water flow rate bag that measures the true rate of flow from faucets and showerheads.

The DIY Toolkit lending program, originally piloted at the Cupertino Library, follows on the heels of a 2010 Kill-A-Watt electricity meter lending program. The electricity meter was a hit at the libraries, where wait-lists for the meters became common. The Kill-A-Watt meter is now an important tool in the DIY Toolkit. The meter helps people “understand the energy consumption of high-use appliances such as refrigerators — and importantly, the less obvious but also high-use consumption of entertainment centers and office equipment,” said Mike Foster, the Silicon Valley Energy Watch Program Manager.

Vampire loads — the sucking of electricity by appliances even when they are turned off — are also addressed in the Toolkit.

“The Kill-A-Watt meter helps people understand the phenomenon of vampire loads and emphasizes the importance of unplugging electronics and small appliances when not in use,” said Foster.

According to the California Energy Commission, appliances and small electronics consume about 20 percent of the energy used in California households: <http://bit.ly/1kUCXnw>. The State has set ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced within California by 2020. Most of the state’s energy is derived from coal, petroleum, and natural gas, and energy production from these resources contributes largely to greenhouse gas emissions.

Water conservation is also emphasized in the DIY Toolkit User Guide. As pointed out in the guide, “nearly a fifth of California’s electricity is used to pump, transport, and treat water. And nearly half of a typical home’s gas usage goes to heating water.” Reducing water use helps to lower energy bills.

The DIY Toolkits are made available to the public with the support of the San José Public Library system, the Santa Clara County Library District, and the City of Sunnyvale Public Library.

“We think the Toolkits will be popular. It’s always satisfying to take steps that both save money and conserve resources,” said Kerrie Romanow, Director of San José’s Environmental Services Department, which administers the Silicon Valley Energy Watch program. “Since about a third of our state’s energy use occurs in homes, conserving energy and water means we each can help reduce greenhouse gases, extend water resources, improve our air quality, and lower our dependence on non-renewable fuels.”

For those who aren’t “do-it-yourselfers,” Silicon Valley Energy Watch also promotes the availability of energy audits.

Residents can achieve energy savings with the help of free technical assistance through the Acterra Green@Home program (www.acterra.org) or the PG&E Energy Savings Assistance Program, www.PGE.com/myhome

Between 2010 and 2012, Silicon Valley Energy Watch completed more than 3,000 energy efficiency projects for PG&E customers in Santa Clara County, saving more than \$6 million in annual utility bills and nearly 55 million kilowatt hours in electricity — enough energy to power more than 4,700 homes. In the 2013–14 program cycle, SVEW aims to save nearly 10.5 million kWh. For more information, visit www.svenergywatch.org

Emy Mendoza is an Environmental Services Specialist with the City of San José Environmental Services Department. ■



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Information on sponsorships also available on the website.

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*Questions? For information please contact Awards Directors
Eileen Whitty, AICP, at ejpwhitty@gmail.com or
John Cook, AICP, at j.cook@circlepoint.com*

Where in the world?



Photo by Jonathan Schuppert, AICP (*Answer on page 11.*)



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Meet a local planner

By Naphtali H. Knox, FAICP



Joe Horwedel, AICP, received his BS in City and Regional Planning from Cal Poly – San Luis Obispo in 1983. That fall, he began what would be a more than 30-year employment with the City of San Jose Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement. He retired from that department in March, after more than seven years as its director. Active in the American Planning Association, Joe is starting his second two-year term as chair of APA's City Planning and Management Division, which has about 430 members.

At what point in your life did you decide planning was for you?

Probably as a junior in high school. I grew up on construction sites and was very interested in how the built world came together. I had friends going to architecture school at Cal Poly and I transferred there from junior college. I had some catching up to do, but happily discovered that the school integrated the construction folks, planners, architects, engineers, and landscape guys during the first two years, putting them all in one lab doing team projects together and discovering how the basic systems work.

As a planner out of school, what were you first involved with that you considered an outstanding accomplishment?

I was about 12 months out of college and a planner reviewing development projects in San Jose. I was assigned to manage a combined car wash and residential project that wasn't working.

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Meet a local planner (continued from previous page)

The engineer who was the developer's representative was really connected and had been pushing projects in San Jose for 20 years, but this one wasn't making any sense. I spent time working with the neighborhood, and with the engineer to better understand what the developer was trying to do. In the end the project was denied and ended up with a regular retail development, which is what the area really needed. I felt this was a significant accomplishment, with my first quote in the newspaper.

I had taken on a person who had this aura you would never really challenge, and asked tough questions about the fundamentals and what were they really trying to accomplish. The process and outcome established my credibility in the development community, and the engineer and I ended up in a 15-year professional relationship in which we both really respected each other.

Sometimes we fall into a trap of just saying, "That's really not good planning." I didn't stand in front of the planning commission and say it was a bad idea. Instead I explored the different ways of accomplishing what the developer wanted to do. That allowed the developer to step away and realize that a purely commercial development was the right thing to do and better for the neighborhood.

That brings up the politics of planning, especially in a big city. Did you assess political situations and did you have a standard approach?

Planning values reflect what the community is about. Every community is different. Even within San Jose, every community is different. In Alum Rock the issue is one of survival; in the Almaden Valley, it's quality-of-life. The politicians from those communities have very different values, and the planning organization needs to reflect and help accomplish those.

Land-use planning is political. My guiding principle is "Be politically astute but apolitical." We know that campaign money is many times tied to the development community. You need to recognize that that's out there. But you don't need to play to that. You just have to understand the dynamics and be thoughtful about how you professionally present issues to the community, the planning commission, and the city council.

How would you characterize your leadership style?

In San Jose, a pretty substantial amount of decision-making is given to the planning director. Still, you can't do everything yourself; and in a large organization, you can't be everything to everybody. You've got to let go and trust your staff. I like to let people do their work. On projects, rather than getting involved in design details, just ask the staff to be thinking about those issues. I let the staff celebrate their successes, and if something got screwed up, that was my responsibility. Let them know you're not going to leave them hanging out there.

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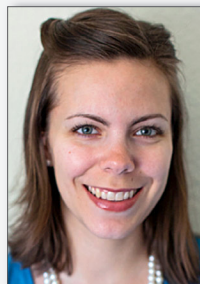
Aaron Aknin, AICP, is Redwood City's new Director of Community Development, effective May 7. He most recently was assistant director of Planning and Community Environment for the City of Palo Alto. Earlier, Aaron was community development director in San Bruno, where he worked in the planning department for 10 years. He holds a Master's in Public Policy from California State University – Northridge and a BA in Urban Studies and Land Use Planning from San Francisco State University.



Gerry Beaudin, MCIP, AICP, is now Zoning Administrator, City of Mountain View. Over the past eight-and-a-half years, Gerry served in several planning capacities with the City of South San Francisco, including principal planner and oversight board member. He holds a Master of Science in Planning (Urban Planning), from the University of Toronto, and a BA (Honors) in Urban and Economic Geography, from Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.



Mika Miyasato, AICP, is now Senior Transportation Planner at AC Transit. She will be leading AC Transit's upcoming Major Transit Corridors Study. Over the past 13 years, Mika has been a senior transportation planner at HNTB and a transportation planner at Korve Engineering. She holds a Master of Urban Planning (Urban Design and Planning) and an MS in Civil Engineering, both from the University of Washington, and a BA in International Affairs (Spanish) from Florida State University. From 2008 to 2011, Mika was associate editor of *Northern News* and served on the Northern Section Board.



Jennifer Piozet, APA California *Northern News*' associate editor, is now working for Alameda County Water District's Drought Resource Center. She is also interning with The Overhead Wire. Jennifer holds a Master of Urban Planning and a BA in Art, both from San Jose State University. ■

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Plan-it sustainably

Ecodistricts — from notions to actions

By Scott T. Edmonson, AICP

Are you ready to move from sustainability ideas to neighborhood action? As part of its planning innovation event series, APA California Northern's Sustainability Committee worked with EcoDistrict.org to bring their introductory half-day workshop to the Bay Area on June 2nd (MetroCenter, Oakland, CM 3.5). Participants in the first of two sessions will review the EcoDistricts Framework, a four-step management tool to guide a revitalization process to spur neighborhood and district-scale sustainability. In the second session, participants will apply the framework in a mock planning and strategy exercise.

Terms used in the workshop will include:

Regenerative

A regenerative neighborhood, city, or region is a place where the economy and the built environment function so as to increase the productivity of both human and natural systems.

Restorative

A restorative neighborhood or city is one that mitigates negative socio-economic and ecological impacts in ways that repair the damage to the built and natural environments.

Ecodistrict

A distinct area of a city or county in which a partnership of residents, businesses, and government develop innovative solutions for energy and water infrastructure that cannot be accomplished at the parcel scale. Ecodistricts can form the building blocks of sustainable, restorative, and resilient neighborhoods and cities.

The Portland Sustainability Institute developed the initial ecodistrict approach by convening business, higher education, nonprofit, and municipal leaders to advance a set of next-generation initiatives for urban sustainability in the region. Tested in neighborhood pilot projects, these game-changing ideas would weave together community livability, ecological resiliency, and broad-based prosperity. It was hoped the results would fuel business and policy innovation, enhance the quality of life, and lead to neighborhoods and cities that would be both sustainable and restorative. Thus ecodistricts present a new model for public-private partnerships that emphasize transforming neighborhoods and cities to become resilient, vibrant, resource efficient, and just.

For registration and cost details (APA members receive a discount) for the workshop on this trending approach for creating restorative neighborhoods and cities, go to <http://bit.ly/1grpWdF>

Northern Section's Logo Competition deadline is

MAY 2nd

APA California – Northern will be hosting the 2015 California Planning Conference in Oakland. To draw on the talented art community in the Northern Section, we are holding an open competition to design the logo for the conference based on the theme "Rooted in Authenticity." Each designer may submit up to **three entries**.

Please go to the Section's conference website for more information:

<http://bit.ly/1liRyos>

Two thirds of California's developed land is under extreme stress

By Sarah Goodyear, *Next City*

The other day, a woman standing on a street corner in Berkeley was hit by lightning. (She was, remarkably, just fine. <http://bit.ly/1fQBG9k>) Thunderstorms are rare in the Bay Area, but this one was welcome, lightning strikes aside. It was part of a weather system that dumped as much as two inches of rain on the East Bay hills, which have been parched by a three-year-long drought that has affected the entire state.

That rain, however, wasn't enough to turn things around for a state that is facing its worst water crisis in memory. Nor was the snow that fell this year in the Sierras, where the snowpack measured just 32 percent of average at the end of a wet season that started late and never really got going. Some communities are running short on drinking water. Farmers are letting fields lie fallow. The next threat, as this not-so-wet wet season comes to an end, is fire.

As bad as the drought is, however, it is not the only reason for the water crisis in California, experts at the World Resources Institute say. The state has one of the most complicated water systems in the world, according to WRI, and that system is constantly juggling the competing demands of the powerful agriculture industry, booming cities, and fragile ecosystems. Even without drought, it is near its limit. <http://bit.ly/1fQBVk>

According to WRI's research, 66 percent of the state's irrigated agriculture is facing "extremely high levels of baseline water stress," meaning that 80 percent of the available water supply is already being tapped by users — including farms, homes, businesses, and energy producers. With usage like that, there's no margin for dry spells.

"You really want to take a step back and look at the big picture in California," says Paul Reig, who leads the design and development of WRI's Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas. "Our analysis indicates that much of California is under water stress. The total water withdrawn annually every year is really close to meeting the renewable supply in the state of California. And we're not just looking at one year, we're looking at 50 years of data."

Water has a history of being a hot political issue in California, and this drought is no exception. In January, House Speaker John Boehner recently made a trip to the state to frame the water debate as "fish vs. farmers" (<http://bit.ly/1fQCdYK>), upping the anti-environmentalist rhetoric that gets tossed around whenever water runs scarce. Politicians such as Boehner see opportunity in presenting this as a case of competing causes. Their rationale is that diverting water from protected ecosystems, such as the Sacramento

(continued on next page)



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River Delta, where the endangered delta smelt swims, will solve the irrigation shortages faced by farmers in the Central Valley, where water storage has dropped by 5.3 trillion gallons over the course of the current drought. It won't be that simple, says Reig.

Despite the kind of grandstanding embodied by Boehner's trip, California is taking real steps to manage and balance its precarious water reality. The state recently passed a \$687 million drought plan, including \$472 million for conservation and recycling efforts.

<http://bit.ly/1fQCvib>

Reig says the focus on better use of existing resources, rather than chasing after new supplies, is a step in the right direction. As he and his colleagues wrote in a recent blog post:

"Historically, people re-engineered water supply to meet demand. Looking forward, regulators, communities, industries, and agricultural operations will have to significantly re-engineer demand to meet the available supply." <http://bit.ly/1fQBVkJ>

Reig says that after generations of failing to face the finite nature of water resources, California — and other water-stressed regions around the world — are beginning to confront the new reality head-on.

"I do think that stakeholders in California are increasingly reaching the realization that [managing demand] is the road forward," he says. "You only have so much water. You have to think how we're using water and if we're doing it in the most efficient way possible. It's a huge opportunity for technology and investment."

Sarah Goodyear has written extensively about cities and the challenges facing them. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and was the founding editor of the Streetsblog Network.

A version of this article was originally published in Next City's Watermark on April 3, 2014. Republished with permission. Watermark is made possible with the support of the Surdna Foundation, <http://www.surdna.org>

Assessing the sustainability of Bay Area cities' general plans

By Scott T. Edmondson, AICP

Would you like to learn about the APA *Sustaining Places Initiative's* new criteria for preparing and assessing general plan sustainability? Then review APA's newly proposed criteria and standards and attend a UC Berkeley class presentation, first week of May 2014, in the Department of City and Regional Planning. Listen to undergraduate student teams present their results, and join a half-hour discussion afterwards led by Charisma Acey, Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning.

Over the course of three sessions, the class will evaluate and rate the sustainability of the general plans of Berkeley, Dublin, Emeryville, Fremont, Mountain View,

Oakland, Petaluma, Richmond, San Francisco, San Jose, and San Rafael. The class will then evaluate the rating tool and process.

For more information, contact Scott T. Edmondson, AICP, at scott-e@sustainability2030.com, or go to <http://bit.ly/1n5eICX>

NOTE: If you are attending the 2014 APA Conference in Atlanta, a one-day workshop will be led by UNC Professor Emeritus David Godschalk, FAICP, on APA's Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places, Session W404, Saturday, April 26.

Apartment rents set record. Bay Area apartment rents are rising at nearly double-digit annual rates and have reached record levels, [possibly choking off] the region's economic boom. The main cause of the rising rents? The red-hot job market is outstripping housing construction. —George Avalos and Pete Carey, <http://bit.ly/1jLPc27>

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Instructors: Mayor Christopher Cabaldon, David Tilley, and Raef Porter. AICP | CM 2.5

CEQA: A Step-by-step Approach (online): Clarify and deepen your understanding of CEQA and the implications it has for your organization, plan, or project.

Instructor: Terry Rivasplata. AICP | CM 6.0

Redesigning the Zoning Ordinance: Discover how to transform your zoning ordinance into an understandable, streamlined, defensible, and effective planning implementation tool. *Instructors: Bruce Jacobsen and Laura Stetson.*

AICP | CM 6.0

Regional Planning and Sustainable Communities

Strategies: This course will focus on SB 375 key requirements, review the relationship between modeling and planning, and consider opportunities and constraints going forward. *Instructor: Bill Higgins. AICP | CM 6.0*

Successful CEQA Compliance: An Intensive Two-Day

Seminar: Learn how to clearly understand and comply with CEQA guidelines in this interactive seminar, designed to assist public agency staff, consultants, attorneys, developers, members of environmental organizations and others.

Instructors: Terry Rivasplata and Maggie Townsley.

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Answer to "Where in the world?" (Page 4)

Crystal Tower, Osaka Business Park — looking north along Osaka Castle Moat. Photo by Jonathan Schuppert, AICP, January 2014.

Sic transit? "After the American Public Transit Association announced that public transit ridership reached an all-time high of over 10 billion riders, a number of commentators sought to minimize the importance of this news, using a wide variety of arguments. The transit pessimists are right, I suppose, in pointing out that most Americans still drive to work. But the transit boosters are right in pointing out that transit use is not only rising, but rising to a greater extent than in past decades." —Michael Lewyn, <http://bit.ly/1m9qLMa>

Northern Section is 'media partner' for California Energy Summit

Attendance fee discounts available to APA members

The Planners Working Group on Energy and the Built Environment, Northern Section's Energy Initiative, has arranged for APA California-Northern to function as a "Media Partner" for the upcoming 2nd Annual [California Energy Summit](#), May 28–30 in San Francisco.

Members of the working group will be among summit attendees. APA members who attend will receive 10 percent off the normal registration fee.

The working group's efforts are premised on the assumption that future developments in energy and power generation will occur more frequently near and within populated areas, increasing opportunities and the need for planning processes. (See <http://bit.ly/1qHaosY>.) A number of the Summit sessions will address this assumption directly, and will include discussions on the integration of renewable energy, new transmission line development, and California's emerging energy storage market.

If you have questions or need instructions for discounted registration, please contact Josh Hohn at jnhohn@gmail.com ■

Oakland rents vs. SF. "While the average [monthly] apartment rent in San Francisco is \$3,518, it's \$2,019 in Oakland. Commercial office space in SoMa costs \$57 a square foot compared with \$26 a square foot in Jack London Square, according to the CBRE real estate firm."

—Joe Garofoli, <http://bit.ly/1ofN9Ze>

Climate change disruptions likely to be profound

In a 2500-page, March 31 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said the world is ill prepared for risks from a changing climate that has already affected agriculture, human health, land and ocean ecosystems, water supplies, and livelihoods across the world.

The report concludes that people, societies, and ecosystems will face different vulnerabilities in different places and the risks will be difficult to manage. But investments in better preparation can pay dividends both for the present and the future. Adaptation to reduce the risks is starting, but with a stronger focus on reacting to past events than on preparing for a changing future.

Justin Gillis writes in *The New York Times*, March 31, <http://nyti.ms/1ghWp50> • "Climate change is likely to grow substantially worse unless greenhouse emissions are brought under control. Ice caps are melting, sea ice in the Arctic is collapsing, water supplies are under stress, heat waves and heavy rains are intensifying, coral reefs are dying, and fish and other creatures are migrating toward the poles or going extinct.

"The oceans are rising at a pace that threatens coastal communities and are becoming more acidic as they absorb some of the carbon dioxide. Organic matter frozen in Arctic soils is melting, decaying into greenhouse gases that will cause further warming. The world's food supply is at considerable risk — [with] serious consequences for the poorest nations. Climate change is already dragging down the output of wheat and corn at a global scale. The [IPCC] report cited the possibility of violent conflict over land, water, or other resources, to which climate change might contribute indirectly 'by exacerbating well-established drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks.'

"This September in New York, a summit of world leaders will attempt to make headway on a new treaty to limit greenhouse gases."

Fred Pearce writes in *Yale environment* 360, March 24, <http://bit.ly/1hKF9dm> • "The 2007 report was almost all about the impacts of climate change. Most of this report, and in particular most of the summary for policymakers, is about resilience and adaptation to inevitable climate change.

"The leaked draft suggests growing agreement among climate modelers that Scandinavia and much of Canada will see more precipitation and that the southwestern U.S., southern Australia, the Middle East, southern Europe, and North Africa can expect more droughts and emptier rivers.

"Southern Europe looks set to fry, with crops shriveling in the fields, reservoirs emptying, deserts spreading, tourists staying away, and demand for air conditioning going through the roof." (*Hat tip to Andrew Revkin, Dot Earth.*) ■



Norcal roundup

Assembled by Jennifer Piozet, associate editor

Looking ahead in downtown San Jose

SPUR, March 11, 2014

Egon Terplan, <http://bit.ly/1m3mXvS> •

“What is possible today for downtown San Jose is built on decades of mostly public investment in streets, parks, transit, museums, theater, libraries, and other amenities. The next decade offers the opportunity to attract people that will give those spaces and places the life they were designed for. Embracing experimentation, allowing for mistakes, and encouraging activity overall in downtown is paramount.

“But a permissive attitude is not enough to ensure the best future for downtown. It’s essential to push for dense new development, hold out for jobs near transit, and maintain good ground-floor design. Focused effort on the planning around Diridon [Station], extending a network of paseos, and further integrating San Jose State University with downtown are also key. It’s also necessary to continue key policy moves to make downtown a friendlier place for walkers, bicyclists, transit riders, and others who will fill the downtown with the dynamism it deserves.”

Affordable, rent-controlled housing in SF?

The Board of Supervisors on April 15 again approved legislation to allow the construction of new in-law units in the Castro district, a pilot program Supervisor Scott Wiener hopes can eventually be taken citywide. —Marisa Lagos, <http://bit.ly/1jLPNkp>

BLM gets nine square miles of coastal land in Santa Cruz County

Mercury News, April 14, 2014

Paul Rogers, <http://bit.ly/1iY0xKg> • “Cementing protection for one of the largest privately owned pieces of land on California’s 1,100-mile coastline, a San Francisco environmental group, the Trust for Public Land, has transferred a 5,843-acre ranch eight miles north of Santa Cruz to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. The land, known as the Coast Dairies property, is a pastoral expanse of rolling meadows, redwood forests, and panoramic ocean views north of Santa Cruz.

“The property was preserved in its bucolic state in 1998, when the Save-the-Redwoods League acquired it for \$44.5 million, most of which came from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in Los Altos. After Save-the-Redwoods League acquired the property, it transferred control to the Trust for Public Land, a larger national organization. [The Trust for Public Land initially sought to transfer the land to the BLM in 2006, but] the BLM, which agreed to take most of the inland acres, didn’t want to manage the row crops and farmers along the coast.

“The ranch was the subject of years of battles, even among environmental groups. Language in the transfer deed bans any commercial logging on the property. The Trust for Public Land also retained the mineral rights, blocking mining or fracking.”

Pauls Corp. closes on \$20M deal for Redwood City land

San Francisco Business Times, April 14, 2014

Nathan Donato-Weinstein, <http://bit.ly/1gzJgFu> • “The Pauls Corp. has paid the San Mateo Credit Union \$20 million for a 2.4-acre site at 525 Middlefield Road in Redwood City, where it is planning one of the largest — and tallest — residential projects in the city’s history. The Denver-based developer is fully entitled for the 471-unit apartment complex, and city officials expect the company to soon pull building permits. The project will include three 10-story towers and about 10,500 square feet of ground-floor retail space that the credit union will occupy at completion, likely in 2016.”

(Norcal roundup continues on next page)

Silicon Valley's alternatives to driving alone

Joint Venture Silicon Valley and Silicon Valley Community Foundation, March 2014

2014 Silicon Valley Index, <http://bit.ly/1mzdFLn> • “Long-term trends show a decrease in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per capita and a small decrease in the share of commuters who drive alone. Short-term trends show VMT increasing with the economic recovery, while transit ridership on Caltrain and VTA Express service has surged.

“Over the last nine years, the means of commute for Silicon Valley workers has not changed dramatically. There have been slight increases (+1 percent each) in the number of people working from home, using public transportation, and commuting by other means (taxicab, motor-cycle, bicycle and other means not identified separately within the data distribution). Since 2003, there has been a corresponding decrease (–3 percent) in the number of people driving to work in a car by themselves. This decrease is accompanied by a 10 percent decrease in VMT per capita during that same time period.

“Overall, transit ridership (number of rides per capita) increased by 1.2 percent in the last year, continuing a two-year upward trend.”
—Transportation, at Index pages 48–49

Humboldt Bay Trail moving forward

The Humboldt Beacon, March 23, 2014

Lorna Rodriguez, <http://bit.ly/1nptAJK> • “Humboldt County was awarded \$2 million from the California Transportation Commission on March 20, 2014, for engineering design and environmental permitting on the southern part of the trail, which runs from X Street in Eureka to Bracut. When the project is complete, a trail will run from the already-constructed Hikshari´ Trail in Eureka along Humboldt Bay to Arcata, officials said. In September, Caltrans agreed to pledge \$1 million for a bay trail. The California Coastal Commission approved a U.S. Highway 101 interchange at the Indianola cutoff with the requirement that Caltrans facilitate a separated bike trail and pedestrian right-of-way.” Construction potentially could start by 2016.

Longer trains not enough for growing Caltrain crowds

Streetblog SF, April 3, 2014

Andrew Boone, <http://bit.ly/1jJonve> • “Caltrain’s rush hour trains have never been more crowded, which isn’t just uncomfortable for riders — it also discourages potential commuters who instead drive along Peninsula highways, and makes rides more difficult for elderly passengers and riders with disabilities. Commuters could see some relief in 2015, when Caltrain plans to extend the length of some of its trains, but the crunch won’t end any time soon if ridership trends continue. Caltrain lacks dedicated areas for standing and has no rails or handles to hold on to, so standing on Caltrain is more difficult than on other rail transit systems such as BART. Caltrain’s cars are designed to maximize seats, with about 650 on each train, making it easy for commuters to read or work on laptops. With Caltrain attracting about 4,300 new weekday riders every year since 2010, ridership will reach almost 60,000 on weekdays this summer, and could surpass 75,000 by 2018.”

(Norcal roundup continues on next page)

Why Twitter’s \$56 million payroll tax break exists. “The taxes that they think the city is not receiving because of the tax arrangement, if the tax arrangement wasn’t there, they still wouldn’t be receiving because Twitter and all these other companies wouldn’t be there,” said Colin Crowell, Twitter’s vice president of global public policy. “So that’s why there is a net tax benefit even with this tax arrangement.” —Alison Vekshin and Dan Levy, <http://bloom.bg/1g2lxNZ>

Mr. Crowell was also in Turkey mid-April, talking turkey and talking Twitter. While he politely declined to open a Twitter office there, he did agree to pay taxes applicable to an affiliate that sells advertising for Twitter in Turkey.

—Ceylan Yeginsu and Tim Arango, <http://nyti.ms/1jLogKV>

Protected Northern California marine area may expand

The SF Examiner, April 15, 2014

The Associated Press, <http://bit.ly/1gzMwAQ> • “Federal officials on April 14 proposed more than doubling the size of two marine sanctuaries off the Northern California coast, a move that would restrict the movements of cargo ships, aircraft, and personal watercraft, and close the areas to oil and gas exploration. The plan announced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration would expand the boundaries of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary by 2,771 square miles, from west of Bodega Bay in Sonoma County to a point just north of Point Arena in Mendocino County. NOAA officials said the expansion is needed to protect whales, sharks, salmon, and seabirds that feed and breed within the two regions, including a site off Point Arena that officials described as the most powerful in North America for generating the nutrients on which sea animals thrive.”

West Oakland’s DIY skateparks

Contra Costa Times, April 15, 2014

Matthew Artz, <http://bit.ly/1p8KYqO> • “Just about everyone acknowledges that the newly-christened Lower Bobs Skatepark is an upgrade over the trash heap that once stood at the terminus of 9th Street at Interstate 880 in Oakland. But several neighbors say that the skaters’ refusal to consider their opinions, or the city’s demands to halt construction, is just as big a slap in the face as people visiting the area to dump their trash. The skatepark, which has won rave reviews from skaters and several residents, was spearheaded by a nonprofit outfit called Gauntlet. The organization raises money for parks designed and built by skaters without government approval. Organizers have an attorney working pro bono and are exploring how to raise money for permits, insurance, and a title search, because it’s unclear whether all of the land is city owned. If successful, it would be the second skatepark in West Oakland. The city is working with community members to build a concrete facility at Defremery Park.”

Food trucks in Novato’s Vintage Oaks shopping center

Marin Independent Journal, April 15, 2014

Janis Mara, <http://bit.ly/1hHOkMx> • “Food trucks could be rolling into Novato’s Vintage Oaks shopping center in June, following in the footsteps — or at least the wheel tracks — of other mobile food purveyors proliferating in the county. Nine trucks would offer dinner from 5 to 9 p.m. one day a week in the parking area if a use permit is granted. Off the Grid, the San Francisco-based mobile food event company, will make its case to the city of Novato at a public hearing April 24. The number of trucks permitted to sell food in Marin has zoomed over the years, going from 14 to 41 between 2008 and July 2012 and jumping to 124 since then, according to Rebecca Ng, of Marin County Environmental Health Services.”

Chevron Richmond donates land to San Francisco Bay Trail

Contra Costa Times, April 16, 2014

Robert Rogers, <http://bit.ly/P4nHWa> • “Chevron donated a 20-foot-wide, one-mile-long strip of land along the shoreline of the Point San Pablo peninsula. The parks district will build a 14-foot-wide trail on the land in the next two years, using money from voter-approved tax measures, said Trails for Richmond Action Committee Chairman Bruce Beyaert. Upon completion, this one-mile segment will provide bike and walking public trail access along the historic shoreline property extending from the foot of the eastern shore of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge to Point Molate Beach Park.”

(Norcal roundup continues on next page)

Tech buses aren't quite so disliked

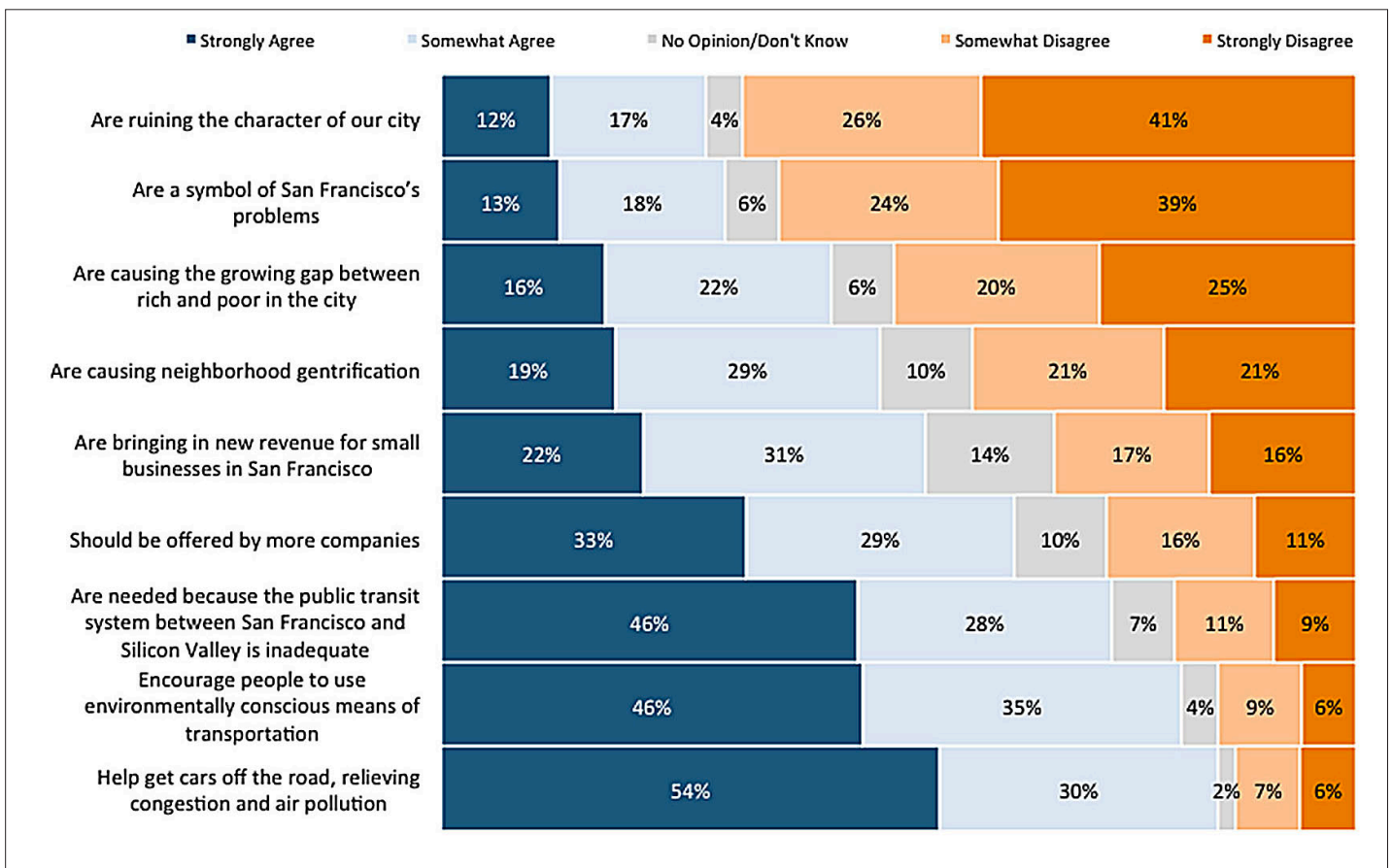
Next City, March 26, 2014

Nancy Scola, <http://bit.ly/1rVJSNZ> • “In the minds of San Franciscans, the Google bus concept is full of subtleties. More people in the city look favorably upon the commuter shuttles than don't. The buses are thought to reduce congestion and encourage the use of environmentally friendly transportation. A super-majority of locals disagree with the notion that the shuttles are ruining San Francisco's character, but more than a third agree that they are causing a growing gap between rich and poor.

“Those, at least, are the takeaways from a [March 2014 survey by EMC Research, <http://bit.ly/1rVMrzz> for] the Bay Area Council. The buses aren't quite so disliked, perhaps because the city is seen as having other challenges to wrestle with.”

You can see more survey-response graphs in Nancy Scola's article in *Next City*.

On April 1, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors granted a Class 6 categorical exemption from CEQA to a pilot program for tech industry commuter shuttles to pick up and drop off employees at public bus stops in exchange for a payment to the city of \$1 every time a bus makes a stop. And you can see Martha Bridegam's April 8th tech shuttle wrapup, with nine links, at <http://www.cp-dr.com/node/3466> ■



Shuttle bus attributes. Graphic courtesy Next City.

Paying farmers to bring shorebirds back to wetlands

The New York Times | Science, April 14, 2014

Jim Robbins, <http://nyti.ms/1hQclfn> • “The Central Valley was once one of North America’s most productive wildlife habitats, with lush wetlands that provided an ideal stop for migratory shorebirds. Of the wetlands that existed before the valley was settled, about 95 percent are gone, and the number of migratory birds has declined drastically. But now conservationists, bird watchers, and farmers have joined in an innovative plan to restore essential habitat for the migrating birds.

“The program, called BirdReturns, starts with data from eBird, the pioneering citizen science project that asks birders to record sightings on a smartphone app and send the information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in upstate New York. eBird generates maps showing where species congregate in the remaining wetlands. By overlaying those maps on aerial views of existing surface water, it can determine where the birds’ need for habitat is greatest.

“The BirdReturns program then pays rice farmers in the birds’ flight path to keep their fields flooded as migrating flocks arrive. Because the program pays for only several weeks of water instead of buying the habitat, the sums are modest.

“The project’s first season ended in March. The conservationists at BirdReturns hope to increase the number of shorebirds that stop in the Central Valley to 400,000, from current levels of 170,000.”

Now to get to work

Streetsblog LA, April 4, 2014

Melanie Curry, <http://bit.ly/OjbAnO> • “Caltrans published a new mission statement: ‘Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California’s economy and livability.’ This is a vast improvement over the old one, ‘Caltrans improves mobility across California,’ and it contains all the right buzzwords. The mission statement was the first item on the Early Action Plan outlined in the State Smart Transportation Initiative report (Jan. 28, 2014) urging deep reforms in Caltrans.”

The Valley is sinking

Sacramento Bee, April 6, 2014

Tom Knudson, <http://bit.ly/1iXSAFa> • “The farm fields of San Joaquin Valley are planted with crops that are trucked to grocery stores across America. Now that bounty is threatened by a crisis: The land is sinking — crippling the region’s irrigation and flood control infrastructure and damaging aquifers. Nature, though, is not to blame. This problem is self-inflicted, driven by exploitation of the last unregulated resource in California: groundwater.

“Three generations ago, so much groundwater was pumped from aquifers that half the valley sank like a giant pie crust, inflicting damage to irrigation canals, pipelines, bridges, roads, and other infrastructure. What stopped it were the federal Central Valley Project and California State Water Projects that flooded the region with water from distant mountains, relieving pressure on the underground water supply. Today, drought, climate change and other forces have unleashed a new era of ground-water pumping, triggering some of the worst land subsidence ever seen in California.

“About 30 percent of California’s water supply comes from underground supplies. Eighty percent of state residents rely to some degree on groundwater. Some towns, cities, and farming operations depend entirely on it. But unlike other Western states, California has no state standards for groundwater management.

“A near perfect storm of drought, climate change, population growth, and declining allocations of surface water [is] changing the face of farming in the valley. Pressure for some sort of state oversight is growing. A proposal in the California Water Action Plan, prepared this January for the governor, calls for better local and regional groundwater management — and state action if necessary.”

(California continues on next page)

“Baby boomers are a major driver of real estate. They continue to sell their homes and move toward more amenities in urban centers across the country. Second only to infill and in town housing, seniors/elderly housing presents the greatest investment prospect in 2014.” —Elizabeth Ecker, <http://bit.ly/1jLQqKC>

A well-being index for cities

FAST COMPANY, March 31, 2014

Jessica Leber, <http://bit.ly/11BV9zg> • “Santa Monica, population 90,000, created its first Youth Wellbeing Report Card in 2012, and from there thought about expanding the idea of well-being to the whole city. In March 2013, [it was] one of five cities to win funding in Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Challenge for an expanded Wellbeing Project, a first attempt to develop a ‘holistic’ single metric for mayors to measure overall well-being. City staff are now busy figuring out what that means and how to measure it.

“In the first half of this year, they are working to convene a virtual panel of experts from around the globe to help weigh these questions. The factors that contribute to well being aren’t mysterious: health, safety, community, and employment are a few examples. The larger question is how to weigh these factors, what existing statistics can be used to measure them, and what new tech-enabled measurement tools to deploy.

“The advisory panel is exploring ideas like [using] analytics from Twitter and Facebook, including how people in the city are connected. Other possibilities include sensor data from roadways that could gauge walkability and even voluntary data feeds from mobile devices. The goal by early 2015 is to arrive at a single well-being index for Santa Monica that other cities in the U.S. and around the world could adopt or adapt. As for Santa Monica, the city hopes to use it to encourage different kinds of internal collaboration and conversation.”

HSR construction could start in May near Madera

Fresno Bee, April 7, 2014

Tim Sheehan, <http://bit.ly/1kp7No8> • “An elevated viaduct near Madera will likely be one of the first major pieces of tangible construction for California’s proposed high-speed rail line. Sylmar-based Tutor Perini, Zachry Construction of Texas and Pasadena-based Parsons Corp last summer won a contract for just under \$1 billion from the California High-Speed Rail Authority to design and build the first 29-mile stretch between Madera and Fresno of a statewide bullet-train line. The first major construction [will be] a 2,000-foot-plus viaduct to go across the Fresno River and over Highway 145. [This will be followed by] a bridge over the San Joaquin River, elevated tracks at the north and south ends of Fresno, a tunnel under Belmont Avenue and Highway 180, and a dozen street or road over- and underpasses. Under its contract with the state, the Tutor Perini/Zachry/Parsons team has until late 2017 to complete its work on the Madera-Fresno section.”

‘Investment firms curb home buying in California’

The Los Angeles Times, March 29, 2014

Tim Logan, <http://bit.ly/1pFmh08> • “Investment firms have all but stopped buying in Southern California, the latest evidence that home prices have hit a ceiling. The professional investors no longer see bargains here. The real estate arm of Blackstone Group, the largest buyer, has cut its California purchases 90 percent over the last year, a spokesman said. The shift is giving regular buyers more homes to choose from, at least those who can still afford them. Experts say an expanding supply should help usher in a healthier housing market, with a better balance between buyers and sellers. Among the 20 firms buying the most California real estate since January 2012, purchases are down more than 70 percent compared with last year in each of the last four months, according to DataQuick. At the 20 biggest foreclosure buyers, including arms of Blackstone and Colony American Holdings, purchases have fallen at about the same rate.”

(California continues on next page)

“Tram’s loss may be bus rapid transit’s gain. BRT — called *bus à haut niveau de service* in French, or BHNS — is the mode of choice for Avignon’s new mayor, Cécile Helle. The Socialist wants a BRT line instead of a tramway, with the idea that a cheaper construction cost will make it easier to carry out her plan to make mass transit free within the city.” —Stephen J. Smith, <http://bit.ly/1ehZ92C>

'Report sees housing bubble echoes in Southern California'

The Los Angeles Times, April 4, 2014

Tim Logan, <http://fw.to/EovlhmL> • “High prices, climbing interest rates, and flat incomes are pushing home-buying out of reach for more Southern Californians, according to a new report from Zillow. And that’s starting to bring back behavior seen in the bubble days of the mid-2000s. Just 43 percent of homes on the market right now in the Los Angeles area are ‘affordable’ by historic standards, Zillow reported, meaning the typical family could buy the house and spend 35 percent or less of their household income on mortgage payments.

“Today, though, the typical family buying the typically-priced home would need to spend 39 percent of its income on a mortgage, the highest rate of any place in the country. That number has grown quickly — up from 30 percent at the end of 2012. This run-up in homeownership costs in Southern California and a few other markets is causing echoes of the housing bubble, at least locally, said Zillow chief economist Stan Humphries. Home buyers are putting less money down, relying on ‘non-traditional’ financing, and moving farther out in order to find a house they can afford, he said.”

Big chunk of money to alleviate CA drought

NBC Bay Area, April 5, 2014

Jon Schuppe, <http://bit.ly/1ehZMJA> • “The first cash [is beginning] to flow from a billion-dollar spigot of drought-relief programs in California. But the money represents just a tiny fraction of what is needed to negotiate a future in which water will become scarcer. California is chipping in about \$677 million, [mostly from] money left from two bond sales approved in 2006. The first block of grants, totaling \$200 million, is expected to be awarded in the fall. A second block will be distributed a year later. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is kicking in about \$200 million.

“A relatively small portion of the money, about \$131 million, is going toward providing immediate help, mostly in the form of water and food, housing and utility subsidies, and job training for people hit hardest by the drought. Farmers with fallow fields or suffering livestock will get financial assistance as well.

“There is no reliable information on statewide use of groundwater, which accounts for 30 to 40 percent of California’s water supply.”

CA rainy season winds down; severe drought remains

California Weather Blog, April 6, 2014

<http://bit.ly/1oHQlwl> • “A notable amount of late-season precipitation fell throughout much of California during late March and early April — a substantial fraction of all the precipitation that accumulated during the current Water Year. This recent precipitation has mitigated some of the very short-term impacts of the ongoing drought in California, adding moisture to the soil surface (and subsequently reducing extreme water stress on vegetation and temporarily decreasing wildfire risk) and resulting in modest flows into most of California’s major reservoirs.

“This is certainly good news, and the hillsides certainly look greener than they did a couple of months ago. But just how much long-term relief has California experienced from its record-breaking drought? Not much. Most of California is still below 50 percent of average for this time of year. The 2013–2014 rainy season is over, for all intents and purposes.” ■

Stopgap funding for high-speed rail. “Even if the cap-and-trade funds are approved, CAHSRA will still have a shortfall of \$13 to \$21 billion. There is an additional risk that if the project is not completed, any federal funds already spent may have to be repaid by the state.” —Melanie Curry, <http://bit.ly/1k0LFA9>

Why live in harm's way?

Big Think, March 8, 2014

David Ropeik, <http://bit.ly/1pFnsfT> • “What were those people [in western Washington] doing, living in such imminent danger? There had been landslides on that hill in 1949, 1951, 1955, 1970, 1984, 1995, 2002, a huge one in 2006, and even one last year. Geologists call the hill Hazel Landslide and Steelhead Haven Landslide. Locals used to call it Slide Hill, and the streams it regularly collapses down into as Slide Creek and Mud Flow Creek. [Yet] according to a *New York Times* graphic depicting building in the slide area, seven of the homes destroyed in this landslide were built AFTER the 2006 event. [One] environmental engineer said that officials’ idea to buy homeowners out went nowhere because ‘...nobody wanted to sell their property and move.’

“Not everyone who lives in areas at risk does so voluntarily, but many do, and all use a variety of subconscious cognitive tools that allow them the choice of living in a place they like, but which could kill them. Some of these people will die because of their choices, or because of the poor risk management choices of local officials who are human too. The Risk Perception Gap is real, it has been studied, the psychology of it is understood, the factors that lead to choices that put us in danger have been identified, and we can apply that knowledge to making smarter choices. Until we do, the hills will keep tumbling down on us, and shame on us for still being in the way.”

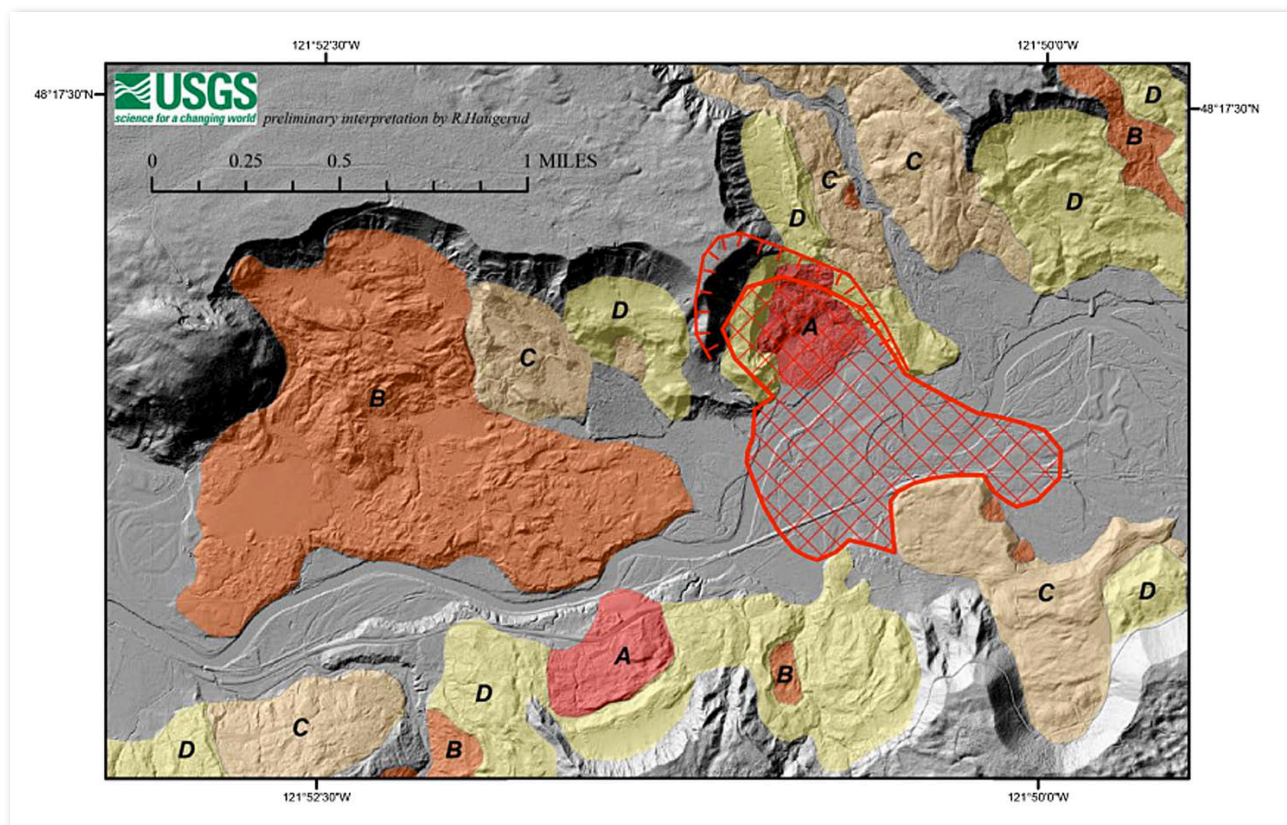


Figure 2. Shaded-relief image calculated from the 2013 lidar survey. Colored areas show older landslide deposits, distinguished by their relative age: A, youngest to D, oldest. The red cross-hatched area marks the approximate extent of deposits from the March 22, 2014 landslide. Source: USGS, <http://on.doi.gov/1h4q1mv>, page 4.

(U.S. continues on next page)

Workplace and residence preferences will change urban landscape

Peninsula Transportation Alternatives, April 3, 2014

Adina Levin, <http://bit.ly/1e08gur> • The following is excerpted from published notes of a March 20th presentation in Sunnyvale by Erik Calloway of Freedman, Tung + Sasaki.

“The business parks that emerged in the mid-20th century were designed to be standalone centers for industrial manufacturing, far from homes and stores. They have plenty of landscaping, but no public space. But increasingly, people prefer public spaces to interact and collaborate. So there is demand for workplaces that have public space and access to restaurants and services that people like to have nearby. The shift in workplace preferences is accompanied by a shift in the places where many people prefer to live. Driving is declining (expensive gasoline and changing preferences). A greater share of startups is locating in center cities and walkable suburban downtowns. Skeptics argue that there is no need to create new development, because the existing area is “built out.” [But] much of the existing building stock no longer meets today’s needs, so changes will be needed to keep up with how people want to live, work, and shop. An alternative is to continue to lose market share to more highly preferred walkable places with public space.”

Streetcars coming to DC’s gentrified H Street NE

Toronto Globe and Mail, April 16, 2014

Eugene L. Meyer, <http://bit.ly/1j2wn7E> • “This summer, the return of streetcars after 65 years will be another step forward for the H Street NE shopping district in the nation’s capital. [H Street is getting] the first of eight planned and heavily subsidized streetcar lines, eventually extending throughout the District of Columbia. District planners are projecting \$8 billion in new investment within 10 years of the lines’ completion. A business owner and the executive director of the non-profit H Street Main Street said, ‘Before the 1968 riots, H Street was a hustling, bustling neighborhood. You could buy anything, from jewelry to music. It was one of the best commercial areas in the city.’

“H Street residents, once predominantly low-income African-Americans, are increasingly mixed, racially and economically. Within half a kilometre of H Street, 63 per cent of the neighborhood’s nearly 16,000 residents are college graduates, 31 per cent have graduate degrees, and the median household income is \$90,397, compared with a Census Bureau estimate of \$64,267 citywide.

“The District’s Department of Transportation has been testing three electrified vehicles along the route. The city’s six streetcars — made in Portland, Oregon, and the Czech Republic — cost \$4 million each. The cost to build the H Street line is \$135 million.

“The initial line is projected to have more than one million riders in its first year of operation. Fares are expected to be \$1 with a SmarTrip card, or \$2 in cash. A 2012 consultants’ study predicted the new system would encourage economic development, including additional retail spending of new households and workers attracted by the streetcar.” ■

Climate will stress food supply. “The [IPCC] panel calculates that [global] food demand is rising at a pace of 14 percent per decade. But it estimates that climate change is already reducing wheat yields by 2 percent each decade — compared with where they would be in the absence of climate change — and corn yields by 1 percent.” —Eduardo Porter, <http://nyti.ms/1ooDVK7>

Worry about subsidence more than sea level rise

Dot Earth, March 28, 2014

Andrew Revkin, <http://nyti.ms/1gA9U4R>

• “What’s particularly notable and disturbing about the situation in crowded delta regions like Bangladesh is that the rise in sea levels is, for the moment at least, not even close to [being] the main driver of inundation risk. The damming of Asia’s great rivers has greatly reduced the sediment flows that created the deltas in the first place and maintain them now. Groundwater pumping (and in some places gas drilling and extraction) is driving alarmingly fast subsidence of urban areas, including in Dhaka. And Dhaka is not an isolated case, nor is that city close to the worst case. A 2013 paper in *Remote Sensing of Environment*, ‘Sinking cities in Indonesia ... reveals significant subsidence in nine areas, including six major cities, at rates up to 9 inches a year. Compare that to a recent estimate for sea level rise near Jakarta of 0.22 inches a year.’ The bottom line, of course, is that coastal communities in many developing countries, from flood-prone agricultural delta lands to crowded cities, face a very soggy future.”

The gondolas are coming

The Atlantic Cities, April 11, 2014

John Metcalfe, <http://bit.ly/1iWJsAA> • “Bolivia gave a public preview in April of the country’s new gondola system. With a length of nearly 7 miles threading through 11 stations, the cloud-kissing people-mover is set to become the world’s largest network of urban ropeways. The La Paz ropeway, one of three planned for the network, [will be] completed later this year. Together, the cars are estimated to be able to carry up to 18,000 people an hour, [easing] some of the terrible congestion in the country’s urban areas.

“Gondolas are cheap and environmentally friendly. Governments have thrown them up in London; Portland, Oregon; Medellín, Columbia; Caracas; and Rio de Janeiro. And the French cities of Toulouse and Brest are set to get versions in the next few years.”

Lessons from the Little Ice Age

The New York Times, March 23, 2014

Geoffrey Parker, <http://nyti.ms/1m31NjY> • “There are two ways to consider the impact of climate change. We can predict the future based on current trends or we can study a well-documented episode of the past. What happened in the 17th century suggests that altered weather conditions can have catastrophic political and social consequences. Few areas of the world survived the 17th century unscathed by extreme weather.

“Today, the nation’s intelligence agencies have warned of similar repercussions as the planet warms — including more frequent but unpredictable crises involving water, food, energy supply chains, and public health. States could fail, famine could overtake large populations, and flood or disease could cross borders and lead to internal instability or international conflict. So while we procrastinate over whether human activities cause climate change, let us remember the range of climate-induced catastrophes that history shows are inevitable — and prepare accordingly. We have only two choices: pay to prepare now — or prepare to pay much more later.”

Permafrost thawing could accelerate global warming

Florida State 24/7, April 11, 2014

Kathleen Haughney, <http://fla.st/1qKoUOH> • “Researchers led by Florida State University have found new evidence that permafrost thawing is releasing large quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere via plants, which could accelerate warming trends. ‘What we’ve found,’ said Suzanne Hodgkins, the lead author on the paper and a doctoral student in chemical oceanography at Florida State, ‘is that the associated changes in plant community composition in the polar regions could release carbon into the atmosphere as methane.’

“Permafrost is soil that typically is frozen year round. That permafrost is thawing and decomposing, producing increased amounts of methane. Methane is 33 times more effective at warming the Earth on a mass basis and a century time scale relative to carbon dioxide.

“As the plants break down, they are releasing carbon into the atmosphere. And if the permafrost melts entirely, there would be five times the amount of carbon in the atmosphere than there is now, said Jeff Chanton, Professor of Oceanography at Florida State. ‘The world is getting warmer, and the additional release of gas would only add to our problems,’ he said.” ■

3) activity centering, and 4) street accessibility. Based on the data findings for each large-, medium-, and small-scale metropolitan area, a Sprawl Index score is assigned. The average index is 100: Areas with scores higher than 100 tend to be more compact and connected, while areas with scores lower than 100 are sprawling.

With a score of 194.3, the San Francisco/San Mateo/Redwood City region is the second-most compact, connected metro area in the nation — just 9.1 points behind the first place metro, New York/White Plains/Wayne, NY-NJ. Other ranked metro areas in Northern California are Santa Cruz/Watsonville (sixth place with a score of 145.0), San Jose/Sunnyvale/Santa Clara (24th place with a score of 128.76), and Oakland/Fremont/Hayward, (25th place with a score of 127.24).

What do the scores really mean?

The higher the score, the more likely an individual living in a connected/compact metro area will earn more income, spend less on housing and transportation relative to income, and will live a healthier, safer life (with increased life expectancy). Conversely, the probability of achieving these benefits is lower for an individual living in a sprawling metro area. For that person, the costs for housing and transportation are higher relative to income; and sprawl-like development patterns create health issues (for example, obesity) and safety issues. For example, fatal crashes are more prevalent.

The report urges elected leaders to recognize the benefits of compact, connected communities and to encourage such growth through changes to public regulations and incentives.

Key points

Both reports are full of useful statistics and insight.

- The ranking systems and findings offer a more tangible understanding of why it is important for communities to plan for, support, and implement projects and policies to benefit all residents and modes of transport.

- Crafting Complete Streets policies — or building integrated land use-transportation systems to create a better quality of life for all residents — requires a consortium of planners and urban designers, public officials, stakeholders, advocacy groups, and residents to focus on what needs to be done for the greater good of the community, not just individual needs and desires.
- Such efforts may take time and extensive coordination, but pay great dividends.
- Residents and businesses cherish a “sense of place” and local identity, and policies geared towards direct public investment in their built environment can pave the way for communities to succeed.

As a resident of Livermore, I have witnessed how such efforts led to the transformation of First Street and the surrounding downtown area — now a bustling center for local economic development and an active area for civic engagement and public interaction. And Livermore is not an isolated example. Many Bay Area planners can point to jurisdictions that are working hard to discover new ways to create better connected, more compact, safer, sustainable communities.

As seen in both of the Smart Growth America reports, Bay Area communities and metro areas are generally on the right track and are serving as examples for other jurisdictions throughout the country. In the continuing struggle for community betterment, planners will need to sustain a high-level of public engagement and continue to create innovative strategies and effective public policies for transportation and land use development.

Peter Costa, AICP, PTP, is a Project Manager and Senior Transportation Planner with CHS Consulting Group based in San Francisco. He has nearly 10 years experience specializing in transportation planning, land use planning, and transportation analyses and documents. Peter is a certified Professional Transportation Planner (PTP), and holds a Master of Urban Planning and Public Policy and a B.A. in Political Science, both from the University of Illinois at Chicago. ■

Reviving the Valley's downtowns. “Even in San Joaquin Valley communities, consumers want walkable neighborhoods and close access to jobs, stores, and transit. But current land use regulations and state, regional, and municipal fiscal policies, promote and underwrite outlying subdivision-style development.”
—Curt Johansen, <http://bit.ly/1jLQcTR>

Was there anything easy about being San Jose planning director?

Absolutely. The staff was very professional. They understood what we were trying to achieve. Having 300 people, half of them out in the field every day, you have to trust that they're doing the right thing. I had no sleepless nights.

The city council was pretty uniform over the years in their support of the general plan and the major strategies — that we were going to do infill development, were going to stay out of the hillsides, and growth would be focused around transit. While there are NIMBYs in any community, they understood what well-done growth could bring to their neighborhoods. Instead of just saying “no,” they said, “yes, if,” and advocated for better growth.

Every planner has a horror story. Is there one that pops into your mind?

Yes. The most recent one was a project that suffered from the down economy, and with staff changes it probably went through four or five planners. The developer did not want to invest in consultants to help him sort through issues, and there was organized opposition. It was just a free-for-all. I took on a personal commitment to the property owner, and despite tremendous effort, it's still kind of treading water after four years. It takes sustained energy to get something moving where there are complicated issues. I gave it my best efforts and failed. Someone else can try and fix it. It's just a project from hell. Every community has them.

Are there any college courses you wish you had taken when you had the chance?

How development is financed. I don't know that any of the planning schools in my time offered something in the economics of real estate development. Stanford does that in the real estate school, and the Urban Land Institute offers it as a two- or three-day class.

Also, how do you organize a process to guarantee a schedule that also makes it easier to get a great outcome? Planners need to be seen not just as regulators saying “no,” but as a multidisciplinary group of people who can offer incentives and organize a process that leads to success. There's not a nickel of city money in Santana Row, but we partnered with the developer to look at the things that would get in the way of achieving our collective goals. We then agreed to work through getting rid of the barriers.

We were still going to deal with the fundamental planning issues and give them a rigorous review, but we weren't going to let the way we did things in the past prevent us from reaching our goals.

What advice do you have for mid-level planners?

- Don't fall into the trap of “that's bad planning.” Be articulate about what it is you're trying to achieve.
- Adopting a plan is not success; it's building out the plan that counts. Be seen as part of the solution to implement plans.
- Understand how development gets financed. Know how to attract that capital into the community and build the right thing. What does the market need in that location?
- “Yes, if. Be prepared to say we will support this project if you can do these things,” and don't be outlandish about what the ‘ifs’ are. This isn't so much a negotiation as it is staying ahead of developers.
- Be willing to listen to new ideas and to people you may disagree with. Be prepared to ask the right questions.
- Know how deals get put together. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and talk to a developer who's doing something in another city to see if they, or maybe their peers, would be interested in doing something in your community.
- Developers are looking for certainty in process and schedule. Expedite review, yes, but be rigorous in that review. And always move forward, not backwards.
- Being a director is different than being a planner. Moving up, beyond being a supervisor, is not just being a more technically proficient planner. You need skills in budgeting, personnel, auditing, politics, and more. Your skills as a critical thinker, negotiator, and communicator provide a great foundation.
- Continue investing in yourself and your profession. Keep learning, and help the next generation.

Interviewer Naphtali H. Knox, FAICP, is the editor of Northern News, an assignment he began in 2005. He was the recipient, also in 2005, of the American Planning Association's Distinguished Leadership Award to a Professional Planner. ■

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