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Room to Breathe

YOU CAN HAVE YOUR HOUSING AND A GREENBELT TOO

POS Planners Propose Affordable Housing And Open Space As Dual Objectives

Design and Density Are Key

The following article, written by Dan Marks, Director of the People for Open Space (POS) Housing/Greenbelt Program originally appeared in the July issue of Regional Exchange. Michael Henn, a long-standing POS member, currently Zoning Administrator for the City of Livermore, had a parallel article in the same publication. Both planners are re-examining the concept of density as a tool for open space and energy conservation.

By the year 2000, the Bay Area is projected to have about 6.3 million people—1.2 million more than today. But while the population is growing by 22%, the number of homes is expected to grow by 33%, which translates into 665,000 additional homes over the next 20 years. Households are increasing faster than population; they are getting smaller due to changing lifestyles and the maturing of the post-war baby-boom.

Most local governments are planning to accommodate future housing needs as they have for the past 30 years—through construction of primary single family detached housing, mostly existing in the Greenbelt. Many Bay Area cities have zoned almost all developable land for single family housing at low densities. For example, the average planned density is 5.2 units to the acre with an average lot size of over 8000 square feet, allowing only large, expensive houses. Largely in response to this, average new house size in 1980 was over 1800 square feet, compared to the predominantly 900-1500 square foot homes of the fifties and early sixties.

Most Expensive Housing in the Country

Bay Area housing is already the most expensive in the country. Efforts to preserve open space and protect the environment from unwise development are sometimes blamed for high prices. If conservationists fail to respond to these claims and identify possible solutions, the housing issue may be used to discredit environmental protection and used to overcome opposition to disastrous development schemes, such as the "new towns" currently proposed for the Livermore Valley near Vacaville.

The POS Housing / Greenbelt Program

The People for Open Space (POS) Housing / Greenbelt Program was initiated in 1979 to see if housing needs really

(continued on next page)

FUTURE OF BAY AREA PLANNING HEADS LIST OF TOPICS AT OAKLAND CONFERENCE

What the future holds for Bay Area Planners will be one of the topics for discussion at the **Oakland: There Is Here** conference.

Northern Section will host this annual Cal chapter event at the new Downtown Oakland Hyatt-Regency Convention Center, September 26-28, 1984.

The conference planning effort is being guided by co-chairs Norman Lind, Director of Planning for the City of Oakland, Gordon Jacoby, Jefferson Associates of Oakland and San Francisco, and Anne Moore, Director of Planning for the *(continued)*

A PLANNER'S GLIMPSE OF CHINA

Beijing . . . Shenyang . . . Nanjing . . . Hangchow . . . these are several major cities along China's eastern coast that will be featured in a special slide presentation hosted by Northern Section next month.

The picture essay has been created by Bob Sturdivent, Principal Planner with Santa Clara County, who was part of a delegation of U.S. planners that visited China earlier this year in the People to People International Citizen Ambassador Program. The show focuses on housing, transportation, art and architecture in this large industrializing nation. With more than four times the population of the U.S., Mr. Sturdivent was particularly impressed with the large amount of construction activity aimed at improving the quality of life.

Peggy Woodring, economic planning consultant in San Francisco and also a member of the China trip delegation, will join Mr. Sturdivent in what promises to be a very educational evening.

The presentation will be on **November 2, 1983**, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the offices of Whisler Patri, 590 Folsom Street (at 2nd Street), San Francisco. Take MUNI #15, 27, or 42.

Wine and cheese will be served before and after. To register, please call Mr. Chi-Hsin Shao at 558-5423 and make your reservation by October 31, or send your \$5/person check (made payable to APA) by the same date to: 2447 32nd Avenue, San Francisco, 94116.

HOUSING (continued)

conflicted with open space and to define what could be done to save the Greenbelt. There need not be a conflict. In fact, preservation of open space, combined with efficient use of available land inside urban areas will, in all likelihood, lead to greater housing affordability and healthier, more vital cities.

Five major strategies have been identified for using land within cities more efficiently to meet housing needs which in combination accommodate expected demand and provide a better mix of housing types. There are places where moderate, or even high density, should be encouraged. Yet many cities have little or no land planned for moderate density housing, and very few promote it, which further aggravates the crisis.

What is meant by moderate and high density? Definitions will differ from place to place. For example, "moderate" densities in San Francisco may be considered "very high" in Sebastopol. Still, many places have designated almost no land on which three or four story condominium or apartment buildings can be constructed. Regionally, the average density of proposed development allowed by local government plans is considerably lower than that of existing development.

Density Is The Key

Density is important for land preservation. The lower the density, the more land used up for housing. The demand for housing could be accommodated on substantially less vacant land if, in general, somewhat higher density housing was encouraged. That does not mean high-rises: it means more two and three story townhouses or condos, more attached single homes, and smaller lots.

Not only does density save land, it is also essential for affordability. While some higher density is not affordable—there are many very expensive, high-density condominiums—low density housing is almost never affordable. Few if any developers put up small, bare-bones, inexpensive units on quarter acre lots. Moderate density housing allows developers to build smaller, affordable units and still make a reasonable profit.

Smaller, denser housing is well suited to the needs of many new households. Couples with one or more children have declined to thirty-one percent of households nationally and twenty-seven percent in the Bay Area. Two-thirds of households formed during the last 10 years were households of single persons, unrelated individuals and single parents. The proportion of elderly is also growing. Often these smaller households do not want large homes on quarter acre lots. They desire affordable, smaller units, in central locations with access to jobs and services.

Strategies for Compact Housing

Vacant Land. A greater mix of housing types can be encouraged on vacant land not in the Greenbelt. Instead of zoning land for only (or primarily) single family detached housing on 7,000-10,000 square foot lots, it could be zoned for 4,000-6,000 square foot lots, more condominiums and townhouses that share walls, and even a few three or four story apartment-type developments. For example, going from four to five units per acre yields a twenty-five percent increase in housing. Simply expanding the mix of types of development instead of committing vast tracts to only low density development will go a long way toward meeting housing needs while preserving open space.

Major Streets. The case studies we conducted as part of our Housing/Greenbelt Program research indicate that there is substantial opportunity for housing development on vacant and underutilized land along major streets and commercial strips. New higher density development (2-3 story buildings) along these streets would have little or no impact on existing neighborhoods, would make use of existing sewers and roads, and would usually have direct and convenient access to transit. There are many examples of well designed development along such streets, which shield the residents from the traffic and noise along the street, create amenable living environments, and provide spacious courtyards of green open space. At moderate densities (20-30 units to the acre), such housing is likely to be more affordable than units elsewhere and thus be attractive to a large portion of the market.

Downtowns. Over the last twenty years, almost every community in the region has watched the deterioration of old downtown areas as retail stores moved to shopping centers, industries moved to industrial parks, offices moved to "business parks," and the housing around and in the downtown declined. Revitalizing downtown has been a high priority for many small and large cities, and some have embarked on major redevelopment programs. But who will go there? Traditionally, downtowns have not solely been places of commerce that close down at five p.m., but active areas that have included homes, shops and attractions. The key to vitality is people—including those who live in and around an area and provide an essential core of customers for services and activities. Central area revitalization programs should, therefore, include housing development.

Industrial Reuse. Many industrial areas are unlikely to be needed for new industrial development while other areas have a severe imbalance of jobs and housing and inadequate transit and roads. Rezoning a small proportion of well-located, vacant industrial land could provide a substantial number of new houses and help balance nearby jobs with housing. Many cities have begun the process of redeveloping selected former industrial areas for housing including San Francisco, Richmond, Berkeley, Emeryville, and Hayward. Some cities, such as Sunnyvale, have recently rezoned industrial land for housing to relieve congestion.

Second Units. The first four strategies call for new moderate density development in underdeveloped or undeveloped areas. The fifth strategy is the only one that would require any change in existing built neighborhoods; second units (also known as accessory or in-law apartments) in existing single family homes. Many houses are simply too large and too expensive for the smaller households of today. Allowing part of a home to be converted to an accessory apartment makes little or no change in outside appearances, makes more efficient use of those homes, and creates a substantial number of new housing units. Usually, the owner occupies one unit and rents the other. Because the impacts of second units on current neighborhoods are a major concern of existing residents, we studied them. In general, we found that the impacts on two key concerns of neighborhood residents—the availability of parking and neighborhood character—would be quite small. The benefits, however, were quite large: the development of needed rental housing, affordability for moderate income people, efficient use of land and housing resources, conservation of energy and old housing stock, increased security and income for the elderly or other owners, and increased tax revenues with little cost for cities.

Dan Marks

Northern News UPDATE...

Where does your APA dues dollar go... a topic currently under discussion by the Northern Section Board of Directors. A breakdown according to National, Chapter (State) and Section allowances is being developed and will be published in a future issue of *Northern News*.

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More services for APA members were discussed by Chapter President Frank Wein at a retreat held recently for Section Directors at Asilomar. There was general consensus that these would best be provided at the Section level, but a specific plan for funding the added benefits has not yet been devised.

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Relief from traffic congestion is the goal of new planning efforts in Marin County. Nineteen cities and towns, aided by funds from the San Francisco Foundation, are studying transportation alternatives along the Highway 101 corridor.

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Subscriptions to *Northern News* are available: \$10/year for non-members; no charge for APA members residing in Northern Section Cal Chapter. Approximately eight issues per year. Includes Jobs In Planning listings.

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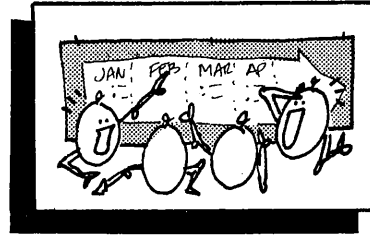
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* PEOPLE FOR OPEN SPACE *

Housing Reports of Special Interest
To Planners:

1. Second Units: An Emerging Housing Resource
Includes a 2nd unit impact analysis for typical single family neighborhoods. 120pages, \$15.00
2. Assessing Residential Land Availability
A resource guide with recommendations and examples. 40 pages, \$8.00

Other reports available on evaluating residential development potential along commercial strips and in downtown areas. For publications list, call POS at (415) 543-4291; or write to 512 Second St., San Francisco, 94107

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