

NORTHERN NEWS

A Publication of the Northern Section, California Chapter, American Planning Association

From the Ground Up...

Community Restoration in the Oakland Hills

by Thomas H. Doctor

RECOMMENDS

MAY 14 1992

DUNCAN R. JONES

On October 20, 1991, at about 10:45 AM, sparks from a previous day's brush fire ignited into an urban wildfire that consumed 1,600 acres of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills, destroying 3,000 dwelling units and leaving over 6,400 people homeless. Twenty-five people died and 150 people were reported injured. The flames, driven by dry northwest winds gusting to 50 mph, burned houses at a rate of 400 per hour, leaving only gray ash and brick chimney stacks. The devastation was so complete and overwhelming that the episode was proclaimed a major disaster by the City, State, and President of the United States.

After the initial shock, Oakland quickly responded with an expedited development permit process designed to allow fire survivors to rebuild their houses as soon as possible. A Community Restoration Development Center (CRDC) was opened at the edge of the fire-damaged area to serve both as an information resource and one-stop permit center. The CRDC will remain open for the estimated two to three years the rebuilding effort will take.

The CRDC, operating from a 20,000 square foot former supermarket, provides a discrete facility housing all the rebuilding and development permit processes needed by fire victims. The center consists of personnel from public works, fire marshal, city manager, finance and city planning departments, integrating traditionally separate disciplines in a single physical and organizational arrangement.

The center serves two purposes. First, it provides an expeditious response to the permit needs of the fire victims. Second, it provides an opportunity to develop and test modifications to the city's permit process. Prior to the fire, this process had undergone a management audit that suggested reorganization to reduce processing time. The most successful and accepted aspects of the one-stop permit procedure developed at the CRDC will be exported and incorporated into the citywide permit system. The trained staff of the center will serve as a cadre for reorganization of the city's entire permitting process.

Within hours after the flames were extinguished, the Mayor, Council, and Manager announced that the city's policy would be to rebuild the devastated area as soon as possible.

(continued on page 5)

AWARDS BANQUET TO BE HELD JUNE 26th

Make your reservations now!

The annual APA Northern Section Awards banquet will take place on Friday, June 26 at the UC Berkeley Faculty Club. This event continues to be one of the most popular put on by the Section each year. It presents an opportunity to acknowledge the significant professional achievements of our colleagues and recognizes programs which have been particularly innovative, effective, or unique.

This year's program will begin with a no-host cocktail bar from 6:15 to 7:15 PM. Dinner and the awards program will run from 7:15 to 9:30. Awards chairman Wayne Goldberg and Section Director Don Steiger will host the event and the award winners will present brief summaries of their work. Seventeen projects have been submitted and will be reviewed by the awards jury.

This is the perfect opportunity to learn about some of the more exciting new programs in Northern California and visit with your colleagues. Mail in your coupon now and we'll see you on the 26th.

RESERVATION FORM

YES! I would love to attend the Awards program! Enclosed is a check for _____ (\$25 per person) payable to Northern Section, CCAPA.

Name: _____ Name: _____

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Return by June 19, 1992 to Wayne Goldberg, City of Santa Rosa Planning Department, PO Box 1678, Santa Rosa, CA, 95402.



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June 26th 1992



Awards Banquet
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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

By Don Steiger

These are difficult times for many of us. Consulting contracts are reportedly few and far between. The development community has significantly reduced its pace. Many, if not most, cities and counties are facing staff reductions. Other public agencies have reduced salary and benefit packages. I receive more calls than ever from planners seeking employment or relocation.

The social contract seems to be up for renegotiation. Fresh assaults are being launched on all public services, entitlement programs, and especially, the environment. Election promises are outnumbered by politically motivated accusations.

Remember — "Quality planning IS cost effective!" Hard times, like catastrophe, bring out the best in people and the worst in people. How do we as professionals respond to the continuing diverse challenges in the face of personal adversity? When the going gets tough, tough planners keep going.

This is the third column which addresses the "Spirit of Planning" theme of our next state conference in Pasadena. See you there — bring your thoughts. May 7 is the date for the next NSCCAPA event on Electronic Media. Get tuned up before going to the National Conference.

A warm welcome to Jim Walsh, our new liaison from the Peninsula and the latest addition to the Northern Section Board. Jim lives on the Peninsula and will in touch with San Mateo County planners shortly to organize an event. Ron Bass, Past President of CCAPA, has asked me to remind you that Cal Chapter is recruiting for Vice President for State and Local Affairs, Vice President for Professional Development (AICP required), and Student Representative. If you're interested, give Ron a call at (916) 737-3000.



South Bay Chapter of AEP Formed

A South Bay Chapter of the Association of Environmental Professionals was formed at an organizational meeting on March 18, 1992. The chapter was formed to advance the state-of-the-art of environmental planning and management in the South Bay. The chapter is open to professionals in all disciplines engaged in environmental planning and resource management.

Officers elected at this first meeting included President (Michelle Bjurman, City of Cupertino); Vice President of Programs (Michael Bethke, City of Santa Clara); Treasurer (Steve Padovan, City of South San Francisco); and Secretary (Hugh Graham, County of Santa Clara). APA members who wish to remain on the new chapter's mailing list should drop a note with their address to the Vice President of Membership: Buford Holt, SRI International, 333 Ravenswood Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

From the Far North

By *Stephan Lashbrook*

Over 200 people attended what may have been Humboldt County's first regional planning conference on March 13 and 14. It was about as diverse a crowd as one could imagine, with representation by numerous city and county staff, elected and appointed decision-makers, realtors, developers, designers, builders, environmental activists, and a good number of folks who just wanted to learn more about planning.

Speakers Victor Dover (of the Dover-Kohl architectural firm from Miami) and Mike Corbett (Town Planners of Davis, CA) brought an excellent combination of success stories, humor, high and low-tech solutions, and a warning to plan wisely or watch this beautiful area be consumed in sprawl like much of the rest of the country. Corbett and Dover make a great team because their messages are similar but their styles are very different.


Corbett provided his quiet, casual, "we did it in Davis and you can do it here too" message in his usual calm manner. He mixed in slides from Village Homes with slides of European communities to show how a conscious effort can make community growth positive.

Dover was more upbeat, funny, and generally hard not to like. Lacking the caustic tone that has been attributed to his compatriot on the neotraditional path, Andres Duany, Dover got the audience to laugh about local projects that many of

us helped to create. He mixed slides from a variety of East Coast communities with local shots to help convey the message that even here "behind the redwood curtain" outside influences can have a positive effect.

County Planning Commission Chair Kitch Eitzen put the value of the conference in perspective in her opening remarks. She said that when she first met Victor Dover and heard him talk about the ways in which local projects could be approached differently, she initially thought of all kinds of reasons why it can't happen here. She quickly noted that attitudes such as that are the only reason why creative planning does not happen.

The clearest sign of the success of the conference was not that so many people attended, but that most of them did not want to leave when it was over. After 20 years in this strange profession, it was a very good experience for this writer. It reminded me that life is not all use permits, neighborhood battles, and political quagmires. I was glad I helped make it happen and grateful to Northern Section for the assistance that it provided.

The entire conference was videotaped and has now been shown on local access TV. Copies of the video will be available from Arcata Community Access Television, c/o City Hall, 736 F Street, Arcata, CA 95521. 


The Media Column

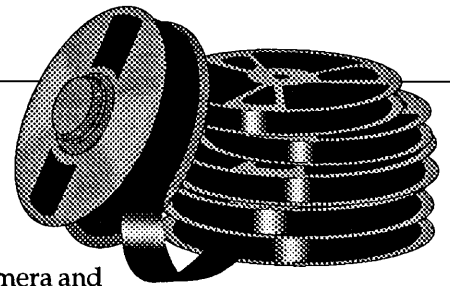
by *Hartmut Gerdes*

If you had a production facility nearby that would allow you, maybe even assist you, to get your message on video tape and on the air, and it would be dirt cheap, would you be interested?

There is such a facility in every major Bay Area city or county, thanks to the Federal Communications Commission's mandate to cable television companies to sponsor such spin-offs in return for the privilege of broadcasting across federal skies. And as cable TV mushrooms, so do "community access" stations. Cable companies are generally not fond of their offspring, which may account for the modest technical standards and tight quarters of many facilities. However, San Francisco's "CityVisions" (Channel 25), for instance, is so much in demand that there is an eight-month waiting list for the video recording studio and an editing room the size of a broom closet.

Public access facilities typically offer local non-profits camera and lighting equipment, a three-camera recording studio (for interviews, public service announcements, small staged events, etc.) a modest switcher and basic editing equipment. While the facilities are generally rock bottom by video industry standards, with available formats usually in the amateur range, it comes at a token charge. Unfortunately, the community access television channel is not viewed by many. But you may upgrade and air your production elsewhere after purchasing the rights from the cable provider. A producers workshop (which is a bit like a planner-in-a-day workshop) is required before you will be allowed to use the facilities. To find the community access station in your area, call your cable TV provider.

Hartmut Gerdes, AICP, is the NSCCAPA's Communications Director and is the principal of Square One Film+Video. 



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Chuck Myer's *Planlines* column in the April issue about public vs private planners reminds me of the debate about whether real baseball isn't baseball unless its played in the open air on grass fields. Baseball purists tend to overlook that the joy and value of the game is derived from *playing it*, and that the players, even kids using the streets as a field with manholes for bases, are probably getting as much from the game as a \$3,000,000 major leaguer playing in the Metrodome or the fans in Fenway Park.

Public planners and private planners are still planners, and planning is still the name of this game. It appears that Mssrs. Myer, Wilbanks, Worthington, et. al, are trying to identify a distinction without a difference in the field.

I don't believe that the distinction should be perpetuated. Consulting planners often have public agencies as clients, and work as hard as the public agency's planners to promote the public interest. On the other side of the coin, public agency planners are easily found engaged in projects which specifically benefit the private sector.

Furthermore, planners employed by private corporations often have the dual responsibility of guarding corporate interests in public decision-making and ensuring that public interests (as articulated by regulatory policies and procedures) are factored into corporate decision-making.

Myer's wristwatch analogy in defining a consultant is a "timeworn" cliché. Most organizations justify the hiring of consultants because they don't have the staff time/ expertise/ credibility to adequately address an issue. If there is no "value added" in hiring a consultant; that is, if any client (public or private) simply gets from a consultant what they feel they could have done on their own, they *should* have done it on their own. At the same time, the consulting community has the obligation to every client to provide the added value. That requires a vigorous effort to thoroughly understand the unique specific public objectives at hand, and to go beyond "what worked for the XYZ corporation" or "what we did in Baltimore." At that point the private consultant can call his/her planning relevant. In my experience, there are many examples of both good and poor practitioners.

Finally, it is a disservice to all planners to concentrate on who works harder/ longer/more-or-less creatively, etc. We all know that every organization has good and not-so-good workers. The issue isn't who is working on what holiday. It's who is working to solve a problem, and who can bring the best resources to address it. Good planning, rather than "professional development" should be the main goal.

Like baseball, the value of planning is the work itself. Planning is at its best when private planners and public planners complement (rather than take shots at) one another. After all, there are too many people out there who don't see any value at all in planning. We don't really have the luxury of debating what constitutes the purest brand.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Wiederhorn

Planning Manager, Port of Oakland



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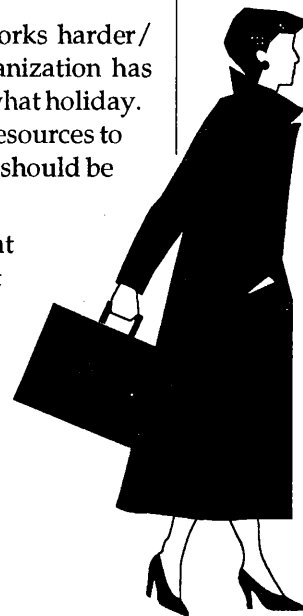
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

by Jaunell Waldo

Take a moment to look at the Northern Section's Directory and you'll note that very few women are serving in a leadership capacity. Only one elected officer and three of the liaisons are women. At most Board meetings, I am the only woman present, and my term as treasurer is ending.

You have a great opportunity to take a leadership role in the Northern Section through the upcoming elections.

We are still seeking candidates for the Positions of Director Pro Tem, Administration Director, and Treasurer. These positions take a minimum amount of your time and provide opportunities for networking, socializing with other planners, and providing direction for our Section's activities. Please think about getting involved. Call Mark Caughey at (510) 215-4330 if you're interested.



From the Ground Up ...

(continued from page 1)

The current procedures for responding to the disaster are authorized under Emergency Orders issued by the City Manager. Using City Charter provisions, the City Council has empowered the Manager to establish interim building, safety, and zoning controls for the fire-damaged hills. This has allowed the city to respond instantly, temporarily by passing more time-consuming procedures required for Council enactment of ordinances and resolutions. The use of the emergency powers has extended beyond the initial period expected and will remain in effect so that the city's goals of rapid clean-up and rebuilding can be achieved.



Within hours after the flames were extinguished, the Mayor, Council, and Manager announced that the city's policy would be to rebuild the devastated area as soon as possible. A policy was adopted to allow the same facility to be rebuilt on a fire-damaged site without delay. The "same facility" concept was developed to allow fire victims to rebuild with the same floor area and height as previously existed on the site, regardless of the current regulations governing bulk, setback, parking, density, etc. A 10 percent increase in floor area and height was permitted, similar to that allowed in other communities rebuilding after disastrous events. Those persons who verify their former house dimensions may follow an expedited permitting process with no requirements for variances, design review, or other current site-related regulations. In all cases, however, applicable building, fire, and energy codes must be met.

Additional strategies have been developed to encourage the residents of the area to rebuild and remain in the city so that they may continue to contribute to Oakland's multi-faceted, metropolitan character. Prior to the fire, the area housed a middle to upper-middle income population in predominantly single family homes. Its residents represented a mixture of professional, educational, cultural, and technical backgrounds. Its proximity to the University of California and other campuses provided homes for academia. Artists, doctors, lawyers, architects, and business professionals also called the area home, attracted to the unique neighborhoods found there.

The strong feeling of neighborhood identity was expressed in early December, 1991 when California Emergency Design Assistance Teams (CEDAT) conducted working sessions with fire victims. The message received was that residents wanted their neighborhoods rebuilt to recapture the context

that had existed prior to the fire. They did not want tract home, mass-produced results. They wanted the diversity of design and the eclectic pattern and style that had evolved during the area's 80-year history.

Before the fire, the City had adopted a special design review procedure for all new residential construction. In the fire-damaged area, an expedited "checklist" process was developed. Points are accumulated for items on the checklist, resulting in a pass or fail score. This approach discourages poor design while allowing innovative architectural solutions.

Policies restricting street parking, encouraging more on-site parking, and discouraging increased density are also being considered. Many of the area's steep, winding streets were approved in the 1920s and were developed with paved widths as narrow as 18 feet. These conditions contributed to the difficulty of fire response and the destruction that resulted.

Meanwhile, efforts to prevent future catastrophes are already underway. City staff have developed proposals for a Fire Suppression and Prevention Assessment District covering the entire Oakland hill area. District funds would be used to clear underbrush, develop a vegetation management program, and provide additional services to the fire-prone area. A June, 1992 bond measure is proposed to generate funds for new fire-fighting and communication facilities. Class A roofing is being required and certain exterior siding materials are being restricted in the hill area. Water supplies have been evaluated, and interior fire sprinkler requirements have been explored. The debate over the effectiveness of sprinklers relative to their high costs is still unresolved. Another debate is raging over who will bear the cost of undergrounding local utility lines.

Since the fire, the city has actively involved area residents in the exchange of ideas and the evolution of development policy. Staff meets with neighborhood representatives on a regular basis. Neighborhood technical review committees explore redevelopment issues and suggest new processes and regulations governing reconstruction. The enormity of the problem and the traumatic experience of those affected has often made the task difficult and the progress slower than originally anticipated. However, the involvement of residents is seen as the key to planning a new future for an old community.

Thomas Doctor is a Senior Planner with the Oakland City Planning Department



Planlines

by Chuck Myer, AICP

DFFERENT STROKES

Words cannot express what Oakland teenagers are feeling these days. So they've invented some new ones. And to make sure that you get their message, they've stenciled their new words in huge Roman Block letters under freeway interchanges along Interstate 580 between Park and Seminary.

The five-month project completed earlier this year by students from Oakland, Skyline, and Fremont High Schools was refreshingly unique, and has interesting overtones for city planners. The kids wanted to use some of their excess talent, energy and creativity to make a mark on their environment in a new art form besides graffiti. With some help from the City of Oakland, a program was set up to allow the kids to work with an experienced public artist, and the result is now visible along embankments under overpasses.

eRACISM.

INFORM(N)ATION.

D fference.

INVISIBLE COLORS.

What does it all mean? It means that a group of educationally disadvantaged kids sat down with a recognized artist, Seyed Alavi, and tried their hand at some wordplay to express themselves. The words they were to create had to be quick to visualize, with lingering meaning, preferably a double meaning. The process was just as important as the end result, and the teachers, administrators and specialists involved in the project all worked to make sure the educational value of the experience was milked for all it was worth. Group dynamics were learned during the design of the project; consensus among the 13 participants was a must.

Using the prefix e- to help exit from (or erase) racism was the goal of the first creation. According to instructor Wanda Broussard, some neighbors weren't ready to hear this particular message. "Nobody wants to admit that racism still exists in Oakland today," she mused. Perhaps this sentiment led to the students desire to educate our country's citizens; this was clearly the goal of the second new word, "Inform(n)ation." And what is the hidden meaning behind the third? "I make the difference." The fourth visual used more than just linguistics, but relied on graphics as well. This mural included whitewashing the negative image behind the letters to let the institutional gray of the overpass spell out "invisible colors."

Under Alavi's guidance, the kids spent about three days climbing scaffolds and painting each overpass statement. Most of the work took place after school and on weekends and holidays. Large cardboard templates and stencils were used for the straight and curved letters, with the grid method of enlargement employed to bring it to the full scale.

Besides the artistic implications, the kids got lessons in bureaucracy and politics as well. The project required various levels of approval from the City's Cultural Arts Division, Public Works Division, and of course, CalTrans (one can only imagine what that entailed). The public was involved in the review process, the art process, and the reaction process. When a few negative letters to the editors cropped up, the students wanted to rebut. They could, said Broussard, but only after having another full lesson on editorial policy, structure of a business letter, etc.

Clearly some positive youthful energy was put to good use during this exercise. Communication takes many forms, and each generation comes up with a few new ones (even if this one does slightly resemble those "wordplay" boxes on the comics page). Still, as planners, it's our responsibility to learn each form of communication, and be comfortable with it. So how about it, gang? What 10-foot tall "statement" should we choose to get our message across to those travelling by at 55 mph?

"B REGIONABLE"? "NEX(X)US"? Or should we be more subliminal, like "Z_∞O_∞N_∞I_∞N_∞G" (Inclusionary Zoning), or "ABCdEFG..." (de minimis), or "NIMBBYY" (Too "wise" to "be" in NIMBY). Or shall we just stick to our motto: AICP (Any Idiot Can Plan)?

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CAL CHAPTER PLANS SACRAMENTO CONFERENCE ON RFPs

California Chapter APA is sponsoring a "Nuts and Bolts" Conference on the preparation of RFPs — Requests for Proposals. The full-day Conference will provide a dialogue between the public and private sector, focusing on how the RFP process can be improved. Sessions will cover such topics as "Defining the Project and Getting the Money," "How Much Free Work is Enough?," "Proposal Screening and Consultant Selection," and "Contract Negotiation." Case studies will be presented, highlighting "winners" and "bloopers."

The workshop will be held at the Sacramento Hilton at Arden and Highway 80 on Thursday, June 4. Registration is at 8:30 and sessions run from 9:00 to 4:00, with a luncheon included. The cost is \$65 before May 15 or \$85 after May 15, and \$45 for students and planning commissioners. For information on how you can register, call Skye Fleming at (619) 549-3581.

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