

NORTHERN NEWS

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

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Downtown: Where the Bright Lights Are

by Carl Abbott

Why worry about downtown? What's so important that we should have special planning efforts and groups that are devoted exclusively to conserving and improving our downtowns and main streets? The answer is simple: downtown is everybody's neighborhood.

Downtowns are the only truly common ground within the fragmented fabric of modern communities. There are at least three ways in which they serve as the modern equivalent of the village square of earlier centuries:

- They are natural centers for our subdivided and segregated cities and towns.
- They are common spaces.
- They provide our only shared symbols for representing the entirety of our communities.

Downtowns, neighborhood shopping centers, and main streets developed because they were the physical focal points of their communities – the places of least cost and highest-efficiency access for the entire metropolitan community. They still are.

Historically, builders of new towns took care to ensure that one street was wider than the others. As townsites turned into towns, that "main street" became the center of community business and social life. In the most successful cities, new streetcar systems transformed main street into a larger business center with department stores, banks, hotels, theaters, and office buildings. Downtown developed as the one place that every resident could reach with convenience for shopping, entertainment, and services.

Portland, Oregon's reputation as one of the few American cities "where it works" is anchored in large part on the continued viability of its historic downtown. A key factor has been the willingness to make the transportation invest-

ments necessary to keep the downtown the most accessible part of the metropolitan area. The city completed an inner freeway loop before the start of a suburban beltway, developed a transit mall, and took the first steps toward a regional light-rail system. All of these improvements have made it easy to get to the historic urban core and adjacent districts.

Portland has acted on a lesson that is relevant for every city. A society that is worried about the limits of its physical and financial resources has no choice – it must maintain the viability of its best-situated spaces and the capacity of the public and private infrastructure that has developed because of that centrality.

City centers challenge us by confronting us with people who are not our mirror image.

Unless we are willing to admit that we have no community, but only fractions and fragments, then we need to preserve the generations of investment that have created downtowns of all sizes.

It is a telling commentary that many suburbs and cities are finding that they need to create downtowns out of whole cloth. An example is San Jose, the prototype of the suburbanized city. The metropolis of the Silicon Valley area managed to get away without a downtown from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the 1980s, however, residents of this suburb without a center decided to spend nearly \$1.5 billion to manufacture a comprehensive downtown where none previously existed. The pieces should sound familiar: convention center, performing arts complex, museums, hotels, open-air retail pavilion, new housing, and a light rail line. "With a new downtown," noted one politician, "nothing can stop us to ultimately rival Paris, London, or Zurich – all

the great cities." The jury may still be out on whether San Jose is the future Paris of the Pacific, but the implication is clear: a real city has a real center.

Natural Centers

Downtown is the one place in a community that potentially belongs to everyone – rich and poor, black and white, sophisticate and derelict, old and young. In contrast, suburban malls belong to geographically limited groups. Geographer James Vance has suggested that the process of suburbanization has actually divided metropolitan areas into distinct "urban realms" that have almost nothing to do with each other – miniature republics without a United Nations even to start a dialogue.

From Jane Jacobs to William H. Whyte, urban analysts have constantly reminded us that people like people; we like to see, and we like to be seen. As everybody's neighborhood, downtowns build on this fundamental social attraction to serve an absolutely vital function. City centers challenge us by confronting us with people who are not our mirror image. A stroll through downtown gives us the opportunity to interact with (or at least acknowledge) people of different colors and backgrounds and degrees of worldly success. At its most distressing, downtown reminds us that our society contains ruined lives; yet this confrontation with unlikeliness is the wellspring of creativity. It is hard to form new ideas when we only talk with people who agree with us. More than a century ago, John Stuart Mill wrote that "it is hardly possible to overrate the value, in the present low state of human development, of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar. Such communication has always been one of the primary sources of progress."

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

by Steve Noack, Acting Director

San Francisco Conference Update. The 1994 Conference Planning Committee met on May 19 to accelerate the intensive planning effort on next year's national conference. In addition to brainstorming on a conference theme and overall goals, the subcommittee list was finalized and distributed to committee members. Subcommittees will be meeting in the next two weeks. Volunteers are needed for the following subcommittees: Conference Theme, Finance/Fundraising, Local Programs/Sessions, Mobile Workshops, Special Events/Entertainment, Marketing/Public Relations, Local Exhibits, Conference Portfolio/Handouts, Universities/Students/Volunteer Workers, Merchandise. If you're interested please contact Paul Sedway at 415.495-2400 or Lois Scott at 415.558-6411 as soon as possible.

Board Positions. Thanks to all of you who called to express your interest in the open liaison positions. Congratulations and welcome to Ron Glas of the Solano County Environmental Management Department on his new position as Membership Director. Congratulations to consultant Richard Morehouse, AICP, and to George Foscardo of the City of San Bruno on their positions as North Bay and Peninsula liaisons respectively. We still have an opening for Central East Bay Liaison. We are also looking for candidates for the Director Pro Tem position. Please contact me if you are interested in either position.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The deadline for submittals to the July/August issue is July 7.

Please note the following changes in phone and fax numbers for reaching me, Steven Buckley, Northern News Editor.
Phone: 510.654-4181
Fax: 510.874-3268, c/o Steve Noack

The newsletter mailing address is unchanged:

3871 Piedmont Avenue, Box 9,
Oakland, CA 94611

AWARDS BANQUET TO BE HELD JUNE 25th

Make your reservations now!

The annual APA Northern Section banquet will take place on Friday, June 25 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 recognize programs which have been particularly innovative, effective or unique. Nineteen projects were submitted, and have been reviewed by the awards jury.

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 Acting Section Director Steve Noack will host the event and the award winners will present brief summaries of their work.

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 25th!

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: _____
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Return by June 18, 1993 to: Wayne Goldberg, City of Santa Rosa Planning Department, PO Box 1678, Santa Rosa, CA 95402.

Downtown *(continued from page 1)*

What this suggests is the danger of the socially divided downtown. In many large cities, the central business core has been clearly divided between the majority and minority users. If you walk from North Michigan Avenue to South State Street in Chicago, the racial mix on the sidewalk changes almost block by block – there has developed an upscale downtown for white Chicago and a second downtown for black Chicago. The same pattern holds in Los Angeles, where the authentic downtown built before 1950 has largely been abandoned by whites. The language on the streets in now Spanish or Chinese; the old movie palaces show films made in Mexico rather than Hollywood; and the crowds line up at the end of the workday to catch east and westbound buses. Only a few blocks away is the new highrise corridor on the west side of downtown. Impregnable towers turn blank walls to the street as they climb the aptly named Bunker Hill. Professionals zip into protected parking in the morning and wheel out at night toward the hills and ocean. In the same downtown are two realms that coexist in splendid isolation – perhaps one reason why the vast wealth of Los Angeles has yet to be reflected in the generation of powerful ideas.

Downtowns are incubators of new businesses as well as new ideas. Especially on their somewhat jumbled and messy edges, they provide new enterprises with affordable space that is convenient to necessary services. They provide the best locations for the highly specialized business, for the avant-garde, for the strange as well as the standard. "Wherever lively and popular parts of cities are found," wrote Jane Jacobs, "the small much outnumber the large." We spend substantial time and money to develop formally designated support centers for small businesses, when what we are really trying to do is recreate natural downtown fringes and neighborhood business strips.

Common spaces

Downtowns are also our primary civic spaces. The traditional main street of small towns, the neighborhood shopping

district, and the big-city downtown are where we enact the rituals that remind us we are members of larger communities. At the turn of the century, residents gathered at the stage stops, post offices, lodge halls, and saloons to exchange information, advice and gossip. The town band played in the downtown dance hall and park. Today, the cafe and tavern have replaced the saloon, and the hardware store has replaced the stage-coach stop, but the role of main street remains essentially unchanged.

Much the same can be said for neighborhood business districts. In older cities, they help to preserve the identity of ethnic communities and give residents a sense of common place through shared stores, banks, post offices, and libraries. These districts play host to local parades and neighborhood gatherings, and make it possible to conduct everyday business without a journey to the mall or the suburban strip. Downtowns fill the same roles and more. The public spaces of downtown are the venues for parades and celebrations; for festivals of food, folklife, art, and thought; for efforts to gather political support and to influence public opinion through rallies and petition drives. These are functions that are vital for our sense of civic membership and for our survival as a democracy. They are also the functions that are severely restricted within the malls and superstores that try to internalize main street under one roof.

Shared symbols

Finally, downtowns and main streets contribute to the well being of their communities by helping to express their common identities. Downtowns and commercial districts are the front doors of communities. Business travelers judge a city from its airport, the freeway into town, and the downtown with its hotels, highrises, museums, and convention center. Local residents judge city neighborhoods by eyeballing the condition of businesses along the arterial streets. No great city has yet taken a Wal-Mart as its public symbol or put a factory outlet mall on its municipal letterhead. Many places present themselves to the world through

their downtown skylines, through the courthouses sitting in the center of town squares, or through the bright lights of the neighborhood commercial districts.

Some cities – San Francisco comes to mind – become intensely touchy about their skylines. Londoners have been deeply disturbed that new office towers have obscured the view of St. Paul's Cathedral. Philadelphians for many years made sure that no building stood taller than the statue of William Penn atop the City Hall tower.

In many ways, Portland's most important advantage over other cities is the pedestrian ambiance and "European" flavor of its downtown, which has been achieved by twenty years of comprehensive planning. Business worries about suburban competition and parking problems coincided twenty-five years ago with public disgust over a blighted waterfront. In the early 1970s, specific issues were merged into a downtown planning process that drew in public officials, retailers, property owners, neighborhood groups, and professional and civic organizations.

The resulting plan offered integrated solutions to a long list of problems that had been approached piecemeal for two generations. It was technically sound because its proposals were based on improvements in access and transportation, and politically viable because it prescribed tradeoffs among the different interests as part of a coherent strategy. Most of the downtown projects of the 1970s and 1980s implemented facets of the plan, and at the end of the decade a new plan updated the design elements and supported extensions of a thriving business core into downtown fringe areas.

As centers of community life, downtown and main street are strong symbols of community individualism; as centers of business activity, they are open to everyone. As more and more communities are realizing, downtowns have the potential to combine the best of both values as neighborhoods for everybody.

Abbott is a professor of urban studies and planning at Portland State University. This article was previously published in the Upstate Planner Newsletter; Upstate New York Chapter, APA; May 1993.



EVENTS

Planning More Livable Communities

The "Planning More Livable Communities" seminars bring together a core group of individuals involved in the land use planning process from each municipality, designed to help decision-makers become more aware of the critical link between mass transit use and land use, and to develop local strategies for more "livable places."

Presented by the Local Government Commission, and co-sponsored by PG&E and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the schedule for the remaining one-day workshops is as follows:

- **June 4** Napa/Sonoma Counties
- **June 11** Santa Clara County

The workshops are presented in a forum format, with a group discussion in the afternoon to consider ways of designing and implementing plans for walkable communities which are compact enough to support public transit, sustain local businesses, and provide a diversity of housing and jobs.

Workshops have already been held for other counties, including Alameda, Contra Costa, Monterey, Solano, Colusa and Yolo, with good attendance and favorable response. For more information, call Judy Corbett or Jennifer Puser at 916.448-1198.

Can Systems Engineering Save the Environment?

The environmental impact report (EIR) and environmental impact statement (EIS) are the lawyer's version of systems engineering. Systems engineering is a disciplined methodology for managing the risks and decisions involved in designing and implementing systems of optimum capability within the constraints of resources and time. Although it has come into widespread use in the defense industry and in some segments of the com-

mercial industry, this methodology has not been widely adopted by municipal governments as a tool for making decisions and managing complex projects.

This program, sponsored by the South Bay Chapter of the Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP), will present a framework in which local governments can use the methods of systems engineering to evaluate the environmental consequences of projects, illustrated by analyzing the trade-offs in solid waste disposal.

The speaker, **Frederick Martin**, has worked at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center for 17 years and has been a systems engineer at GTE for 10 years. He has been active in promoting container deposit legislation, resource recovery programs, composting of solid waste and sludge, and converting solid waste to energy and other byproducts.

Date: Wednesday, June 16

Time: 7 - 9 PM

Location: Penny U. Bistro, The Alameda at Hillmar, near Santa Clara University

RSVP: Michael Bethke, 408.984-3111

Lives of the Small and Successful

Join ASLA for a design night! Chris Pattillo Associates (CPA) is featured in a program focussing on the tactics used by a small landscape architecture firm to successfully survive the recession and stay competitive. CPA's work consists of small and midsize public projects, parks, multifamily housing, and work for private developers. Learn marketing and management techniques that can help planning firms, as well as other professions.

Date: Thursday, July 22

Time: 6:30 PM

Location: 337 17th Street, Oakland (2 blocks from 19th Street BART)

RSVP: 510.465-1284, by July 16



JOB IN PLANNING

Land Use and Transportation Planners City of Oakland

Contract positions, no benefits.

The Office of Planning and Building seeks qualified applicants for one- and two-year positions in the Comprehensive Planning Division. **Senior Transportation Planner** (\$35/hour) needed to manage preparation of General Plan Transportation Element; requires Masters Degree and 5-plus years experience in transportation planning, knowledge of modeling software, experience in project management and General Plan/EIR preparation. **Planner III** (\$31/hour) needed to assist in preparation of Land Use and Safety Elements; requires Masters Degree and 5-plus years experience in land use planning, public participation, EIR preparation. Excellent written/verbal skills essential. **Planner II** (\$27/hour) needed to assist in preparation of various Elements and participate in on-going advance planning assignments. All positions arranged by contract, no benefits provided. Minorities, women, and Oakland residents encouraged to apply. Send letter of interest and resume to: Willie Yee, Jr., Oakland OPB, 1330 Broadway, Suite 310, Oakland, CA 94612. **No phone calls please.**

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Deadline: Friday, June 25, 1993, 5PM

Applications received after 5PM on June 25 will not be accepted.

Apply at: Human Resources Department, City of Sunnyvale, 456 West Olive Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA 94086. Phone: 408.730-7490

EVENTS

Ecological Community Design and Planning

The Socioeconomic and Environmental Criteria and Benefits.

We as planners have good reason to closely examine how we use the terms "ecological," "sustainable," and "community." They are often being misused by environmentalists, politicians, the media, architects, and planners. Three panelists, self-described front line advocates of ecological and sustainable community planning and design, will discuss the meaning of these terms. It is their contention that planning tools for social stability; economically and cooperatively shared land; natural energy systems, resources and materials; and efficient transportation of goods and people are needed.

Pragmatic solutions to be discussed include intergenerational shared housing, village cluster/co-housing, and transit-fed pedestrian-oriented land use planning. Incentive zoning provisions based upon ecological and sustainable practices, backed up by EPA and CEQA policies, and comprehensive land use and transit programs are tools planners need to incorporate into their language.

Moderator: **Ken Norwood**, Executive Director, Shared Living Resource Center, Inc., Berkeley

Panelists: **Joelle Ann Perkocha**, Associate Director, Human Investment Project, Inc., San Mateo County, and **William Klien**, AICP, Transportation and Environmental Consultant, Capital Partnerships, Inc., Sausalito

Date: Thursday, June 24

Time: 6 PM, wine and cheese

6:45 - 8 PM, program and discussion.

Location: East Bay AIA Office, 499 14th Street, Suite 21, Oakland. (At 12th Street BART)

RSVP: Ken Norwood, 510.548-8618



Transportation Impacts of Land Use Development

This two-day, intensive short course will be beneficial to anyone who prepares or reviews traffic impact studies. Emphasis will be on practical techniques to plan better developments. Students will solve actual case study problems and see examples of both good and bad design.

This is an intensive introduction to the assessment of transportation impacts of new land use development. It covers the fundamentals of: Preparing traffic impact studies, addressing cumulative impacts of new development, on-site circulation, capacity analysis, functional classification of streets, street design standards, parking strategies, access and geometric design, and software demonstrations.

Presented by the University of Southern California Institute of Transportation Studies Extension. Course fee is \$350, including materials. Instructors: **Nazir Lalani**, City Transportation Engineer, Ventura; **Steve Colman**, Principal, Dowling Associates, Oakland.

Dates: July 8 - 9, Las Vegas / October 14 - 15, South Lake Tahoe

For more information, call 510.231-9590.

Two Pacific Rim Conferences in October

Making Cities Sustainable: Balancing Economic with Environmental Imperatives

Learn about profitable and ecological projects, global investment opportunities, innovative approaches to planning. Form alliances with prominent professionals from Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

The Pacific Rim Council on Urban Development is a premier urban planning and real estate association of international professionals from the

private and public sectors. PRCUD's primary goal is to provide networks for information exchange and contact with prominent professionals across the Pacific Rim.

To be held October 17 - 20 at the Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco.

Early registration: August 31. \$350 members, \$400 non-members.

Green Plans for the 21st Century

Learn about how governments are working with industry and citizens to solve environmental dilemmas, and how the Pacific Rim region is developing and implementing Green Plans.

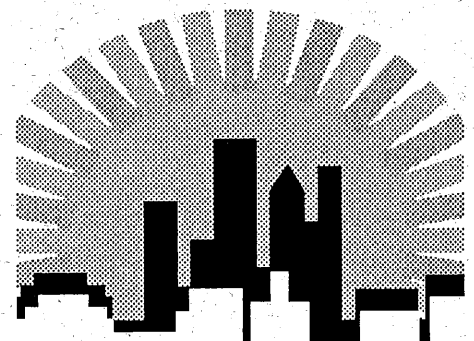
The Resource Renewal Institute is a non-profit organization advocating comprehensive environmental policy plans - Green Plans - on local, state, regional and national levels. RRI's third conference draws on years of research and networking with Green Plan nations.

To be held October 21 - 23 at the Marin County Civic Center, San Rafael.

Early registration: August 31. \$225.

Both conferences: \$500.

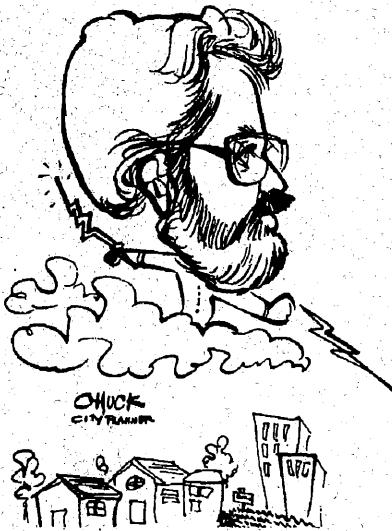
For more information, contact: Lillian Yeh, PRCUD Conference, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, 316 Wurster Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. Phone 510.642-1359.



PLANLINES

by Chuck Myer, AICP

THE WHITE CITY



In the morning mist, along the desolate banks of Wooded Island in the wilderness of Jackson Park, two

groups of people, on different sides of the island, binoculars in hand, peered over the lagoon towards the opposite shore. The fierce winds from Lake Michigan seemed to hamper the efforts of both. As the two groups converged in the bulrushes, the logos on the name badges could be seen: One group's said "Audubon"; the other's said "APA". Each group seemed to snicker at the observations of the other:

"There!" said the leader of the first group in a loud whisper. "There is the long-necked goose thrush!"

"There!" said the leader of the second group. "There stood the largest building in the world!"

This unlikely confrontation between two bands of conventioners actually took place during the National APA Conference in Chicago May 1-5. An APA mobile workshop to Jackson Park commemorated the exact centennial of the opening day of the 1893 Columbus Exhibition. The fair was a tour de force for Daniel ("Make No Little Plans") Burnham, who wanted to prove to the world that cities could be beautiful after all. His, though temporary, definitely was.

The fair was full of "Firsts": The first commemorative stamp, the first Ferris Wheel, the first "midway", and for many visitors it was even the first time they had seen a light bulb, much less an illuminated white city. Up from the bog of a ramshackle park sprung gorgeous white exhibit buildings, fountains and statues, many of which were really designed more like movie sets than elements of a functional city. The grandeur of the fair captured the imagination of a generation, and reunited the United States into a major world player, able to hold its own when

compared to the great expositions of Europe. It is said that the rash of U.S. World Fairs in the decade afterwards (including the San Francisco Pan American in 1915) were mere facsimiles of the Chicago fair.

The only remnant of the Fair today is the Museum of Science and Industry, then called the Palace of Fine Arts. Though huge by our standards, this palace was dwarfed in 1893 by half a dozen other buildings, including the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts building, which was six times larger.

In our relatively young continent, we're not used to something here having been the world's largest something one day and no trace of it left the next. And the fact that the site of such beauty has reverted to nature lends some poetic justice to all of our efforts. The other fair buildings burned down in 1894 (except the Japanese Pavilion "Ho-o-den", which was torched by anti-Japanese yahoos in 1945.)

It's interesting to note a proposal for a quinentennial Columbian Exposition was turned down by the City of Chicago for economic reasons. Basically, we could never do what we did in 1893!

After all, it has been said that the physical infrastructure of the world's cities are based on inventions made 100 years ago: indoor plumbing, the light bulb, the electric trolley, steel frame buildings and elevators, the automobile, the subway and the telephone.¹ All eight were invented between 1876 and 1893, the date of the exposition. What have we accomplished since then?

Daniel Burnham's "White City" gives us a lot of food for thought. After all, as Rick Cole, mayor of Pasadena, reminded us at our last chapter conference: "When Daniel Burnham said 'Make no little plans,' he didn't mean 500 pages."

¹ For more on this theory, see "The Eight Great" in "Building the City of Tomorrow," by John P. Eberhard, professor and head of the Department of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, Washington Post, June 26, 1988.



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CALENDAR

- June 4 & 11:** *Planning More Livable Communities*
Napa/Sonoma County & Santa Clara County
Contact Judy Corbett or Jennifer Puser, 916.448-1198.
- June 13:** *Plans for the San Francisco Waterfront*
Time: 6:30 - 9 PM.
Location: Gabbiano's, behind the San Francisco Ferry Building.
RSVP: Terry Klim, 415.428-2550; Gail Staba, 415.876-2158.
- June 16:** *Can Systems Engineering Save the Environment?*
Time: 7 - 9 PM.
Location: Penny U. Bistro, The Alameda at Hillmar, Santa Clara.
RSVP: Michael Bethke, 408.984-3111.
- June 24:** *Ecological Community Design and Planning*
Time: 6 PM, wine and cheese; 6:45 - 8 PM, program and discussion.
Location: East Bay AIA Office, 499 14th Street, Suite 21, Oakland (12th Street BART).
RSVP: Ken Norwood, 510.548-8618.
- June 25:** *Northern Section APA Awards Banquet*
Time: 6:15 PM, cocktail hour; 7:15 - 9:30 PM, program.
Cost: \$25 per person.
Location: UC Berkeley Faculty Club.
RSVP: Wayne Goldberg, City of Santa Rosa Planning Department, PO Box 1678, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. Reservation form on page 2.
- July 8-9:** *Transportation Impacts of Land Use Development*
Cost: \$350.
Location: Las Vegas, Nevada.
For more info.: 510.231-9590.

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