

Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Fixing Suburbs, Not Building New Ones

by Jerry Haag

"Bye-Bye Suburban Dream" graced the cover of *Newsweek* in mid-May, one of the few national periodicals to draw attention to the predominance of suburbia as a way of modern life. The less kindly term is sprawl. Planners know, however, that despite the publicity of a major news magazine, discussion and critiques of suburban sprawl have been raging for years. The *Newsweek* article also highlighted the New Urbanism (formerly known as neo-traditional) practice of planning as one antidote to suburban sprawl. Earlier this year, the Bank of America in conjunction with the Greenbelt Alliance and other co-sponsors released *Beyond Sprawl*. Adding to the chorus, recent publication of Philip Langdon's *A Better Place To Live* and James Howard Kunstler's, *Geography of Nowhere* offer more fodder for the discussion.

The Applehood Group endorses many of the critiques, but notes that all of the solutions offered from this diverse group propose to combat suburban sprawl by applying new techniques to new areas. Even the thoughtful *Newsweek* article, "Fifteen Ways to Fix the Suburb" implicitly or explicitly recommends better fixes only when we plan the next suburb.

An equally valid and perhaps less costly (and certainly less researched) approach to fixing older suburbs is simply to return to these areas and work with the residents to make them more livable. To provide a more local perspective on the issue, wouldn't we much rather spend time in Sonoma or Saratoga than in some yet to be built and undefined suburb in the Bay Area?

Getting back to the critiques of the post-war suburbia, one of the most telling criticisms is that they can be boring places to live.

Houses (all single family) have only a few basic floor plans and, without the creativity of owners to individualize them, you can't tell them apart. Streets, many of them cul-de-sacs, have the same design. The major amenities suburbs boast are city parks, which are few and far between. Even the street trees are the same species.

This leads to a second practical critique, the lack of centralized gathering spaces. Although some parks have been provided, the remainder of suburban tracts are divided into streets, private yard and patio space, and house. Perhaps that is why kids use streets for baseball, football and other activities. The only readily available open space in most tracts appears to be a sparsely landscaped strip situated between sound walls and arterial streets.

A third critique is perhaps more theoretical in nature, but is being mentioned by more and more planners. By deliberately leaving out centralized mingling spaces, suburbs foster a growing sense of alienation and isolation. Neighbors typically no longer know each other, and there is certainly a minimal sense of community in our "communities." As an adjunct of this, many of our local governments are far removed from the everyday lives of citizens. Other than weekly trash pick up, a water bill and a property tax payment, many residents have little contact with their local government. And, in our current fiscal environment, local governments themselves are stretched to the breaking point with diminishing resources and an ever-increasing social agenda to accomplish.

Directly flowing from a sense of isolation and loss of control is a fear of crime and a general sense of unease with the world at

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DIRECTORS CORNER

by Wendy Cosin

AICP College Bowl - The state conference is coming up at the end of September in Santa Barbara. We are still looking for people to represent Northern Section for the "AICP College Bowl" contest. If you are planning to attend the conference and are good at remembering planning trivia (maybe you just passed the AICP exam!), please call Bonnie Guttman at 510-238-3941 to sign up.

The National Perspective - The Northern Section Board recently hosted a reception for APA national president, Richard Codd, who was heading back to New Jersey after speaking with planners in Beijing, China. Richard briefly discussed his experience in China, stating that the Chinese planners are interested in APA and a delegation may attend the next national conference in Florida. He saw some potential for joint ventures with Chinese planners, but did not think it would be likely that North American planners would be asked to contract for services in China in the near future.

Richard discussed three areas where national APA is currently making major efforts. First, attacks on planning through takings legislation are posing serious threats to the future of planning all across the country. APA is also looking at options for on line services and is developing zoning regulation models for use in areas of the country that may not have adequate planning resources.

When asked what national APA needs most from members, the takings issue was at the forefront of Richard's concerns and he said that members need to be more politically active in supporting planning efforts. When the Contract "On" America came out, one home-builders' organization responded with thousands of letters of concern, compared to only 200 from APA. The national APA Board will be closely monitoring aspects of the Contract that would adversely affect communities and the environment, with a careful watch on proposals that would impair planning and zoning.

Some ideas discussed at the reception to increase participation in this area included:

- Distribution of the APA "Policy Guide" paper on takings to APA members and other planners, including planning officials for use as a resource for writing letters to newspapers, journals, and to elected officials.
- Making connections with other professionals (and their organizations) who are also affected by anti-planning legislation. If there were less certainty about the mix of land uses in an area, bankers would be one example of a group whose business would be adversely affected. Stronger alliances with other organizations such as the League of California Cities and the ULI should also be developed to share information and organize responses to the takings issue and other threats to planning.

It was recognized that some planners may feel that it is not appropriate to become politically active and that we should remain neutral. However, when state and national actions begin to erode our abilities to achieve some of the basic purposes of land use planning, most people would probably agree that part of our job is to look at that bigger picture and to do something about it. The job of APA is to get information to its members to allow them to take whatever action they believe appropriate. It is very possible that the current attacks on planning and the takings threats will be the issue that will mobilize both the organization and its members.

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BOARD MEMBERS

New Board Appointments

The Northern Section Board is proud to announce the appointment of the following new members:

Patricia Jeffery, AICP
Professional Development Director

Joanne Manson, AICP
University Liaison

Both Patricia and Joanne were appointed at the NSCCAPA board meeting held August 3, 1995. Patricia is the Principal of Albany based Placemakers, a planning consulting firm and Joanne is an Associate Planner at the Alameda County Waste Management Authority. Patricia and Joanne both have agendas that will require the support and involvement of the membership to insure successful implementation. Please contact them with your ideas for projects and your willingness to volunteer your time, energy or talent.

Steve Wanat, International Liaison, has completed work on a project in Indonesia and has returned to the Bay Area. Please take time to welcome Steve back to the states, and to congratulate Patricia and Joanne on their appointments. ○

BULLETIN BOARD

Internet Info

An upcoming issue of the Northern News will focus on the internet, and how we as a profession can take advantage of it. Currently there are several places where planners can go on-line to talk with planners or other urban design professionals, read planning related publications or reference planning related information. Check out the following web sites for planning info:

ISOCARP (International Society City and Regional Planners) at

<http://www.soc.titech.ac.jp/titsoc/higuchi-lab/isocarp/index.html>

California Planner at

<http://www.rain.org/~calapa/home.html>

California Planning Roundtable at

<http://vfrontiers.com/~vfrntrs/cpr.html>

AOL subscribers can also get into PLACES, a service for planners and others involved with the built environment. Type keyword PLACES to get there.

The Role and Relevancy of Planners

Several weeks ago Hartmut Gerdes and Mark Rhoades advertised on this Bulletin Board for individuals who were interested in starting a discussion about what future role and relevancy planners will have in the design of our communities. This question is timely, especially with the recent challenges planners have and are facing from politicians and other fronts, including other design professions. The relevancy of planners in the future has also been called into question by recent books and publications, including some written by "New Urbanists." Several individuals responded to our call. This month, the group will convene a meeting at the end of September to discuss the format for this thought process, and what the result could be as it relates to presentation, writing, or some other means of education. It is our intent to document this process, and to present it locally, and perhaps... If you are interested in taking part in this discussion, please contact either Mark or Hartmut, or leave a message on the Northern Section Voicemail at (415) 281-0195.

State Board Elections

Hopefully, you have received your ballots for the state APA Board elections. PLEASE VOTE! As described in the last newsletter, we have two Northern Section candidates who would appreciate your support. The ballots were mailed with the state membership directory which we hope is useful to you. The directory was paid for by advertising, with the costs for distribution covered by the state and local budgets (your membership dollars at work). Ballots must be postmarked by September 15.

USC Graduate Study

USC is now offering a graduate study for mid-career professionals through the School of Urban and Regional Planning, Master of Planning and Development Studies. Courses will be offered in Sacramento, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., with international sites in Korea, Hong Kong and Australia. Options for study include programs in Economic Development and Project Management, International Planning and Development, Environmental Policy and Planning, or a fourth option that allows individuals to design their own program. Classes will be offered beginning this fall. For further information contact the School of Urban and Regional Planning's Student Affairs Office at (213) 740-2052, or E-mail: surp@usc.edu. ○

The Bulletin Board section of the Northern News is intended to provide a forum for individuals to provide the membership with information about events or current topics. If you would like to submit an item for the Bulletin Board section, contact the Newsletter Editor at (408) 866-2140.

Suburbs ... (continued from page 1)

large. Although neighborhood crime watch activities have certainly increased and more police have been added to local patrol beats, it seems that a more divisive solution has become popular—gated communities. As planners, we believe that more social interaction combined with low-key, common sense design ideas are far more effective in reducing crime and increasing the livability of neighborhoods than gates or beefed up police forces.

The loss of long-term residents to a neighborhood is another aspect that has serious consequences to communities. When people have an investment or stake in a neighborhood they generally take better care of their property, and have a higher level of involvement in the community. Longer tenure typically equates to more involvement. The whole phenomenon of a continual search for utopia produces a sort of disposable community notion, which results in detachment and lack of engagement. Why make too great an investment in the people and community if you know that you will only be there a short while?

Environmentally, there is no doubt that the continued pattern of suburban sprawl is costly. Costly to new homeowners, who may have to commute many more miles to work each day. Costly to communities which bear more maintenance costs. And sprawl is costly to the whole region in the form of more air pollution.

Finally, it is apparent that the former strength of our suburbs, good, solid housing stock, is also failing us. Perhaps ideal for the demographically perfect 1950's family with mom, dad, and two kids, this does not describe many suburban dwellers today. Most neighborhoods have seen a sharp increase in one-parent families, latch-key children and perhaps the need to care for an aging parent or relative. Our 1950's houses simply haven't kept pace with these and other social changes.

Are these problems solvable? Yes! Although Applehood doesn't promise to be a panacea, it does offer both theoretical and practical ideas to deal with many of the thorny issues we've discussed. Stay tuned next month and we'll reveal some of our ideas!

The Applehood Group consists of planners, landscape architects and design professionals, currently organizing as a non-profit educational and research entity, dedicated to investigating and distilling the qualities of successful older neighborhoods and applying them to older suburban areas.

Applehood Group principals are Byron Ely, Rebecca Clark, Don Hemry and Jerry Haag.



Assistant Planner

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Under direction, the Assistant Planner position will perform complex advance and current planning projects. Candidates must have the ability to independently organize and coordinate complex zoning and planning projects, prepare recommendations, possess the ability to write clearly and concisely, perform basic statistical and mathematical procedures, and prepare graphic materials in the form of maps, charts, matrices, etc. Candidate must be able to communicate effectively at public meetings, with the general public and with staff of other City divisions, departments and other governmental agencies. Candidates must have the ability to qualify for and obtain a California driver's license, and to drive to project sites. The position requires a Bachelor's degree in planning from an accredited program and two years of planning experience, one of which must be at the assistant level. A Master's degree may substitute for one year of experience. Preferred qualifications include experience with architectural review, CAD, GIS and other computer applications. For application and flyer contact the City of Pacifica Personnel Department, 170 Santa Maria Avenue, Pacifica, CA 94044. Filing deadline is September 22, 1995, 12:00 noon.





Event Planning

We would like your input in helping plan our events calendar for the '95-'96 year. What are the topics of interest to Northern Section planners? Who are the speakers you would be interested in hearing and meeting? In what format would you be interested in seeing the topics presented, panels, symposiums, or debates? As your new Professional Development Director I am very interested in learning how the Northern Section can continue to provide professional development services to our members. We will be meeting on September 19 to discuss your ideas. If you cannot attend the meeting, please call me, or fax your ideas to me. Looking forward to hearing from you!!

Contact: Patricia Jeffery, AICP,
Professional Development Director

Date: Tuesday, September 19

Time: 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Location: 814 Solano Avenue, Albany, CA
(510) 524-7980
(510) 524-7274 fax

UC Berkeley Extension

The University of California at Berkeley Extension program is offering seven short courses for Fall 1995 on land use planning and related topics. Courses include:

Overview of Environmental Laws and Regulations. September 15, San Francisco. \$190

Subdivision Map Act. October 6, San Francisco. \$235

Using CEQA as a Tool in the Project Approval Process. October 20-21, San Francisco. \$225

Regional Planning in the 1990s. November 3, San Francisco. \$170

Easements and Related Land Use Law. November 17, San Francisco. \$235

AICP Exam Preparation Workshop. December 2, January 6, February 3, March 2, and April 20, San Francisco. \$100

Advanced Environmental Law III: CEQA and the Review and Permitting of Complex Projects. December 8-9, San Francisco. \$255

Info: Environmental Management at
(510) 643-7143

East Bay RAC Wine Tasting

The East Bay Regional Advisory Committee invites you to join your colleagues in Livermore during the grape harvest; and to come hear about the groundbreaking regional planning that has occurred in the Tri-Valley area this summer. Consultant Marjorie Macris and ABAG planner Ceil Scandone will relate how elected officials from Danville, San Ramon, Dublin, Pleasanton, Livermore, Contra Costa and Alameda Counties are working to draft a sub-regional planning strategy for the area.

When: September 14, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Where: Cedar Mountain Winery, 7000 Tesla Road in Livermore.

Take the Vasco Road South exit from I-580 and turn left when Vasco ends at Tesla. Proceed about one half mile until you see the huge eucalyptus tree.

Cost: \$10, includes two glasses of wine accompanied by delicious snacks.

RSVP: by September 11, contact Dan Pava at (510) 423-4401

UC Davis Extension— Upcoming Courses

Internet and the Web: Specialized training for environmental professionals. September 6-7 or 20-21, or October 18-19, Sacramento \$295

Environmental Planning and Site Analysis. September 28-29 and October 19-20, UC Davis Campus. \$445

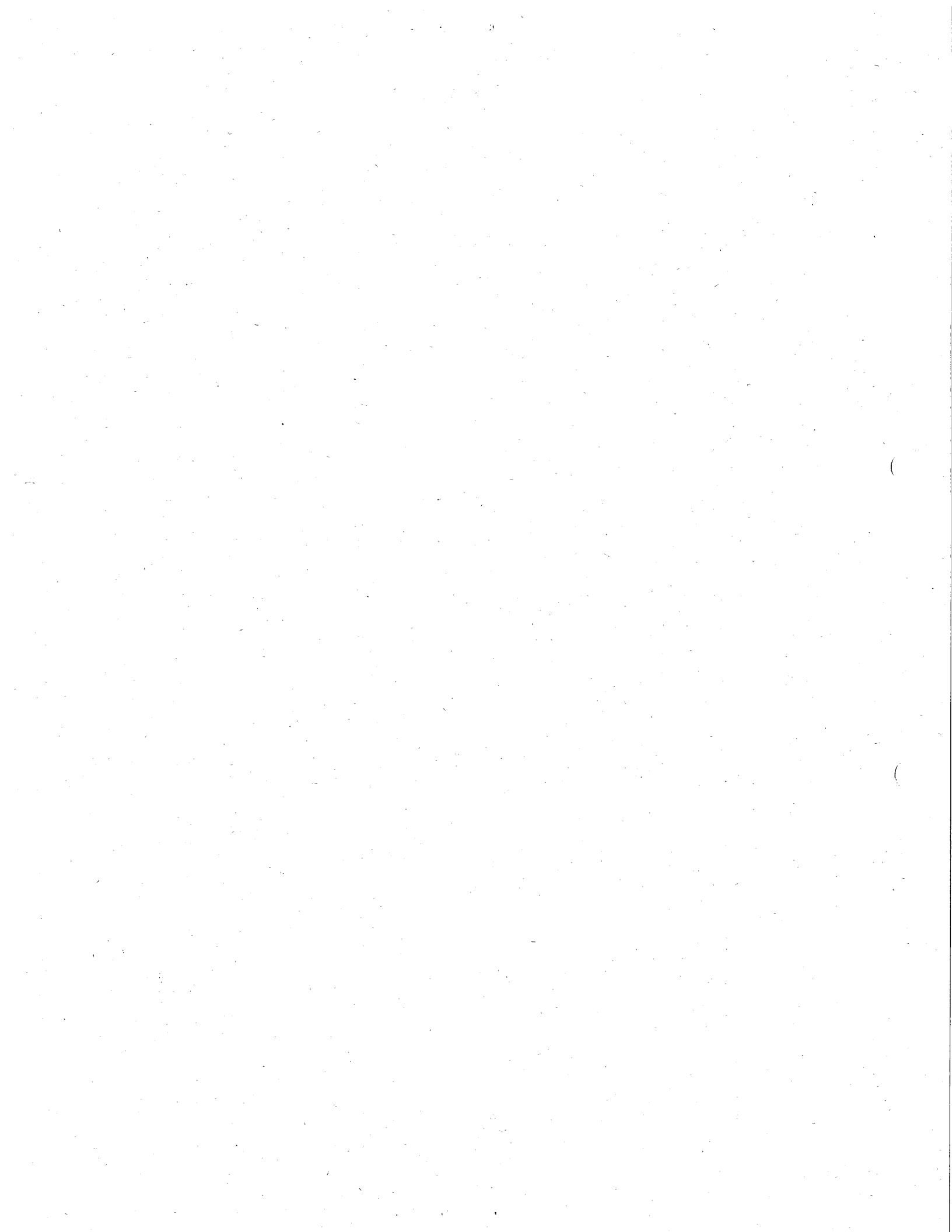
Internet Homepage Design for Resource Management Agencies: Build Your Own Exit Off the Information Superhighway. October 4-5, Sacramento. \$385

Subdivision Map Act. October 13, UC Davis Campus. \$235 (\$170 for AEP/APA members)

Affordable Housing Conference. October 17, Sacramento. \$170

Erosion Control and Land Restoration. October 18, UC Davis Campus. \$235 (\$170 for AEP/APA members)

Info: UC Davis Extension,
(800) 752-0881



Planner

CH2M Hill

CH2M Hill, an engineering and environmental consulting firm, has an opening for an entry-level Environmental Land Use Planner in the Sacramento office. The position includes assistance with the preparation of CEQA and NEPA documents for public and private sector projects such as roadway widening, bridge replacements, subdivisions and other development projects. Responsibilities include writing, researching, field work, and preparation of agency required applications such as streambed alteration agreements. In addition to a BA or BS in planning, environmental studies or other related field, candidates must have strong writing and communication skills, along with general knowledge of CEQA and NEPA. Qualified candidates should send a resume, including salary history and requirements to: CH2M Hill/PL, 2485 Natomas Park Drive, Suite 600, Sacramento, CA 95833. EEO/AA

The Commentary section of the newsletter is intended to provide a forum for members to express their views relative to planning related topics, or to express an opinion relative to articles printed in this newsletter. If you would like to submit an article, contact the Newsletter Editor at 510/ 227-3214.

Are Planners Soft?

by Mark Rhoades

*P*lanners today are slothful, unimaginative and self-serving. The public sector is riddled with bureaucrats and lifelong permit processors who do not care about planning so much as maintaining the status quo. The private sector is full of bottom-line minded compromisers who will find a method for justifying anything if the price is right. In discussing the role of planners and what they do, with both lay people and professional planners, there does not seem to be any consensus on what our mission is or should be. I hear people say that the political environment is too overbearing, or that thick bureaucracies stand in the way of real progress. Why should anyone risk job or career to try to make some kind of difference in the way this profession is conducted, or its future? The answer is simple. We shouldn't.

What we should do is let others define our profession. We as planners can try to please everyone. We can establish a national consensus (one of the buzzwords of modern planners) on what planning should be and what planners should do by letting other groups determine the planning agenda and the role of the planner. APA can give equal attention to the wants of politicians and special interests such as real estate professionals, the building trades, and others. These groups should be able to provide direction for planners because they are very well organized with large, participatory memberships. In addition, they have strong professional organizations with a clear message that is constantly being delivered to the decision makers (i.e. U.S. Congress, the White House, state capitols, city councils, etc.).

If this is done properly planners won't have to worry about having an impact on local or regional decisions – even less on helping to shape the national agenda.

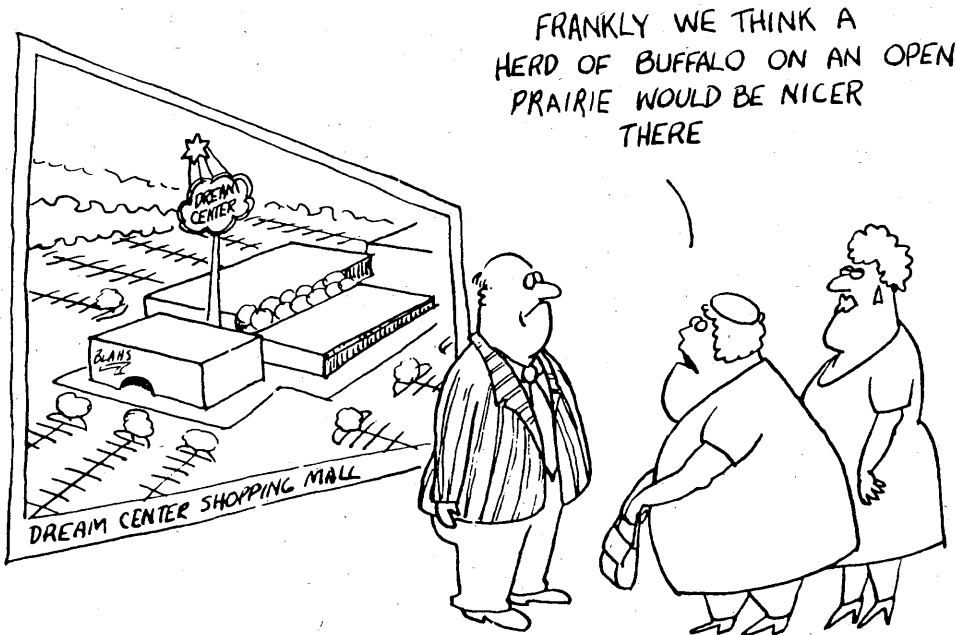
I don't want to be a planner if this is what my future looks like.

The process of defining the role and relevancy of planners is an important one. Planners can, and do have a very important role to play. That role is currently being challenged by the "New Urbanists," developers, lawyers, architects, environmentalists and others. Is there still room for "planners" as we know them? What or who are these planners, and what do they do? If there is to be room and a role for planners it will need to be defined by those of us who foresee filling it.

This profession, and the individuals who comprise it need to begin to take more responsibility for educating the public about planning issues. This responsibility includes writing letters and calling the White House, Congressional representatives, and state officials. It also extends far beyond that. It includes taking stands on local issues and becoming involved in your professional organization and/or (God forbid) local politics. It means taking an active role in defining the way planning is perceived, and thus defining a role for the individual planner.

What is the role and relevancy of planners, and what direction will we be able to provide in shaping community and regional growth and change? If the description in the first paragraph does not appeal to you perhaps you should do something about it. Planners should be successfully communicating a compelling message to the broad public like the New Urbanists are. This message encompasses issues of profound local and global importance such as environmental degradation, resource scarcity, a destructive car culture and the need to rethink "community." Yet, regardless of the merits of the New Urbanists, urban planners are key to helping solve our larger societal problems because we influence the way our communities and regions are planned and designed (and re-planned and redesigned). Planners do need to take note, and action, and define for themselves and the public why our profession is relevant and just what our role is going to be.

Mark Rhoades is the Northern News Editor, and an urban planner with Pacific Municipal Consultants. This article was prepared in part with material provided by Hartmut Gerdes, AICP.



Richard Hedman, "Stop Me Before I Plan Again" APA Press, Chicago

The Rearview Section is intended for humorous or otherwise appealing anecdotes, cartoons, stories, etc. as they relate to planning. If you have or know of something that might fit this description, submit it to the Northern News editorial office for consideration. Chances are that if everyone of the dozens of people comprising this editorial staff like what you submit, it will get printed.



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September

- 6 - 7 UC Davis Extension, Internet and the Web
- 28 - 29 UC Davis Extension, Environmental Planning and Site Analysis
- 14 East Bay RAC – Wine Tasting and Discussion
- 15 UC Berkeley Extension, Environmental Laws and Regulations
- 19 Event Planning, Professional Development

SEPTEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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October

- 4 - 5 UC Davis Extension, Internet Homepage Design for Resource Management Agencies
- 6 UC Berkeley Extension, Subdivisions Map Act
- 13 UC Davis Extension, Subdivisions Map Act
- 17 UC Davis Extension, Affordable Housing Conference
- 18 UC Davis Extension, Erosion Control and Land Restoration
- 20 - 21 UC Berkeley Extension, CEQA as a Tool

OCTOBER						
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November

- 3 UC Berkeley Extension, Regional Planning in the 90's
- 17 UC Berkeley Extension, Easements and Related Land Use Law

NOVEMBER						
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