

Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

The Role and Relevancy of Planners — Rediscovering Our Focus, The General Plan

by Lucian R. Blazej, Director of Planning for San Francisco

MARCH 1996

RECEIVED

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The November issue of *Northern News* had as its feature a series of statements written by colleagues on the role and relevancy of planners. In introducing this topic, Hartmut Gerdes defined planners as "Guiding spirits who can project the big picture, and healers, who can think holistically." Hartmut also observed that "...many planners are, by circumstance or choice, buried by the process, the mechanics or the business of planning, with too limited an involvement in the values discussion and outreach." Donald Woolfe observed that "...we slipped in the eyes of our constituents when we became consummate regulators and not planners." Other recurring themes were the need for planners to be leaders, facilitators, and teachers. Scott Edmondson summed it up by saying planners "...must undertake a massive public relations and education campaign to illuminate the contributions and potential of planning and explain its capabilities."

Rediscovering Our Focus, The General Plan

Reflecting on the foregoing comments leads to the basic question: what activity lies at the core of the planning profession? This is a simple question not easily answered given the vast diversity of planning specialties related to housing, transportation, public health, recreation, open space, infrastructure, planning data and information management, GIS and geography, environmental assessment, urban design, development finance, zoning, subdivisions, area planning, redevelopment, agriculture, natural resource management, and ecology among others. What is planning, as a profession, all about? What will planners do tomorrow? What is our basic mission?

Despite the vast diversity in planning specialties and technical expertise, there is one common and unifying goal that gives relevancy, purpose, and focus to all our efforts. **Creating, maintaining and implementing a General Plan.** As long as people aspire to a better future a process is needed that documents the present, creates a vision that defines the better future, and devises ways to bring about that vision. A rational and deliberate program for solving problems and achieving a better future requires planners and planning. This is what our profession is all about. Are planners and planning relevant? Absolutely!

The General Plan — The San Francisco Experience

On December 20, 1995 the San Francisco Planning Department celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the adoption of our City's first General Plan. This occasion allowed for reflection on the relevancy of planning, the impact of our work, and assessment of the prospects and role for planning in the future. As previously discussed, this time for reflection and assessment comes at a point when many planners themselves are questioning the future role and relevancy of planning.

This questioning, in my view, is prompted by the hard fact that over recent years, support for General Planning in many communities, including San Francisco, has been dramatically cut. Erosion of fiscal support for the foundation of our professional focus, maintenance and implementation of the General Plan, calls into question the value and relevancy of the entire planning profession.

Lu Blazej is the Director of Planning for the City and County of San Francisco. He has been a participant in discussions on the Role and Relevancy of Planners, and he presents the following article to exemplify the importance of planning. The Northern Section is currently working with Mr. Blazej to put together an event that includes a look at San Francisco's past, present, and future planning efforts in light of the 50th anniversary of the City's General Plan.

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DIRECTORS COLUMN

by Wendy Cosin

Did you ever wonder how decisions are made about where State APA conferences will be held? After many discussions on options, the Northern Section Board will be recommending that the October, 1997 conference be held in Monterey.

First, we asked a lot of people what they thought, beginning at last year's conference. We researched a variety of interesting alternatives such as Napa, Santa Cruz, and Santa Rosa, but found out that there are only a few cities that can accommodate the number of people who attend (750 - 800) and are both centrally located and airport accessible. The field quickly narrowed to Oakland, San Jose, San Francisco, and Monterey.

State and national conferences have previously been held, respectively, in San Jose and San Francisco, therefore, we focussed on the other two alternatives. Many Board members wanted to "Do the Right Thing" by holding the conference in Oakland. Oakland deserves both recognition and support, and it also presents important urban issues for conference fodder. The conference would be accessible to local planners who may not have a budget to travel and would also be well located for public transportation.

However, as we talked to planners in both northern and southern California, we veered toward Monterey. Many people look forward to combining pleasure with work at conferences in resort locations. Monterey offers a beautiful setting, interesting things to do and a variety of alternatives for the conference headquarters. We hope to arrange the opening reception at the newly expanded aquarium.

A conference committee of planners in the Bay Area and the Monterey area is forming now. Please let me or another Board member know if you would like to get involved — we will need help!

And now for something completely different - a movie review. Most people won't think of Antonia's Line as a movie about planning; it is more accurately a movie about community, but I think that is what most of us are trying to help create in one way or another. The community's structure — its homes, town, transportation, work, and extended families — bolster the connections that occur. However, the key to its success is the complete acceptance of individual choices, especially women's choices. Rather than a community where everyone is the same, a wide range of differences are not just tolerated, but embraced. Thumbs up!

National APA and AICP elections are coming up soon. Two Bay Area planners — Marge Macris and Alvin James — have been endorsed by the State Board. National Board policies affect legislative agendas and directly affect local planning issues. Additional California perspectives can make a difference. Please vote!



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NSCCAPA Board Meetings

The next NSCCAPA Board meeting will be held on March 14 at Oakland City Hall. If you are interested in attending, please verify the date and time with a Board member in case there are last minute changes.

UC Berkeley Annual SPRING FORUM AND JOB FAIR

"Planning for the New Millennium"
Keynote Speaker: Roberta Achtenberg

The UC Berkeley City and Regional Planning Department invites everyone to attend the 1996 Spring Forum and Job Fair on Saturday, April 20, 1996. This year's theme is "Planning in the New Millennium," intended to provoke a discussion on new challenges and paradigms for urban and regional planning in the 21st century and beyond, while drawing on lessons learned from 20th century efforts.

Registration will begin at 8:30 am, and the event will continue all day. Roberta Achtenberg, Special Consultant to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, has agreed to deliver the morning's keynote address, pending resolution of some logistical details, which will probably have been addressed by the time you read this notice.

The rest of the morning forum will feature speaker panels on race and gender, new urbanism, technology and the internet, affordable housing, transportation technology, and sustainable communities. The afternoon will include a panel on the planning profession, followed by presentations and/or inter-

views with Northern California employers. Last year's Forum/Fair attracted over 300 attendees, including over 100 students from Northern California planning programs.

Additional information on the event can be found at the world wide web internet address http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/city_planning/.

If your firm or agency would like to conduct interviews for summer or permanent jobs, or would just like to make an informational presentation about your firm's work, please contact Sherman Luk, preferably by e-mail at sluk@ced.berkeley.edu, or leave a message for him at (510) 643-9440. You can also check the web site listed above. Continuing and graduating students and entry-level planners can arrange to interview, by advance appointment, with any employers who may be hiring. Check the web page listed above for information first, and then contact Sherman Luk with any questions. In order to help defray expenses, including lunch which will be provided, a \$5 per person admission will also be charged.

If you have general questions, please look at the above web site first (if you have access) or contact Diana Marsh, preferably by e-mail at dmarsh@ced.berkeley.edu or leave her a message at (510) 643-9440. See you there!

Awards '96 - Anticipation Builds...

Another reminder to help reduce the stress in your life in 1996. Plan now to submit your NSCCAPA award nominations by the April 15th deadline. Squirrel away copies of the reports that you will need (7 copies) and call, fax, or mail a request for application materials and instructions to:

Wayne G. Goldberg,
Section Awards Coordinator
City of Santa Rosa, Department of
Community Development
100 Santa Rosa Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
(707) 543-3220 phone
(707) 543-3218 fax

We're looking for a few good cases...

APA's Amicus Curae ("friend of the court") Committee is on the lookout for land use and social equity policy cases at the state and local levels, especially those that may ripen into cases of national interest. We can do our job best if we are made aware of cases at the very earliest stages. When in doubt, let us know. You can call Steve Cochran, AICP, in Washington at (202) 872-0611, fax at (202) 872-0643, or call Dwight Merriam, AICP, at 1-800-826-3579, fax at (860) 275-8299, or e-mail at dmerriam@rc.com.



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 510/ 227-4362.

The General Plan...

San Francisco has a remarkable planning tradition as evidenced by fifty years of Comprehensive Planning, one hundred and twenty five years of land use control, and a civic determination and aspiration to build a great city starting with Burnham's 1905 Plan. Consequently, San Francisco is one of the most attractive and livable cities in the world. It is no accident that San Francisco has a grand Beaux Art Civic Center, Golden Gate and McLaren Parks, a zoo, a compact pedestrian-friendly downtown, a world class public transportation system, a vibrant waterfront, a great new convention and cultural center at Yerba Buena Gardens, attractive and diverse neighborhoods supported by unique neighborhood commercial districts and a network of community facilities such as schools, libraries and neighborhood parks. The urban environment we enjoy today, plain and simply, is the product of sound and thoughtful planning.

The General Plan, as an expression of community goals, aspirations and visions, forms the basis for comprehensive decision making and implementation actions. The General Plan provides focus and direction for both public and private investments, is a base for setting priorities and becomes a standard for measuring success in achieving goals. Without a plan, decisions are arbitrary, often contradictory, and at worst they are self-canceling and destructive.

The General Planning process involves three steps: define what you have today; identify problems and opportunities relevant to current circumstances; and define a future state to be achieved. This future state to be achieved is the essence of the General Plan, setting forth goals and objectives for solving problems and realizing opportunities. Follow-up actions entail developing an implementation program, with set targets and performance measures.

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Monitoring progress and tracking changing circumstances form the basis for future General Plan revisions. The importance of maintaining a current General Plan cannot be overemphasized. Sound planning embodies community goals, values, and aspirations that are supported by credible statistics, environmental reviews and analysis. This is what elected officials, policy makers and citizens expect of planners. It is incumbent on planners to meet this expectation. Our profession depends on it.

Prospects For the Future

A new City Charter takes effect in San Francisco on July 1, 1996. The Charter affirms the role and importance of the General Plan by requiring approval of the General Plan and subsequent revisions by the Board of Supervisors. The stature of the General Plan is further elevated by requiring a two-thirds vote by the Board of Supervisors to override a Planning Department finding of non-compliance with the General Plan. Voter-mandated priority policies for the General Plan also continue to guide both long and short term planning decisions. The Planning Department is currently preparing for our new role and more formal relationship with the Board of Supervisors, relative to the General Plan.

Continued education and public outreach, ongoing contact with elected officials, sound statistical and environmental analysis, applying General Plan policies and guidelines to project and permit reviews, and continuing efforts to keep the General Plan current, will keep planning and planners relevant to San Francisco. Without implementation of the General Plan as a primary goal, planning activities become process without purpose. The General Plan is what makes planners and planning relevant.



Executive Director

Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation

Salary: \$45,000 to \$55,000
+ benefits

The Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation is a land trust in Fairfield, California, that works for the permanent conservation of farm and open space lands in Solano County. The Foundation is seeking an Executive Director to manage all activities of the organization, including land negotiations, natural resource management, fundraising, public information and programs, and financial management for the organization. For further information or to obtain an application packet, please contact the Foundation at P.O. Box 115, Fairfield, CA 94533, or call (707) 428-7580. Applications must be post-marked by April 1, 1996.



NSCCAPA Presents...

Designing for Urban Agriculture and Social Ecology

Paul Okamoto, architect and past president of Urban Ecology, will give a presentation on the Weeks Neighborhood Planning Project. The East Palo Alto Historical and Agricultural Society, Urban Ecology and the National Park Service have joined together to develop a long-term ecologically and economically friendly plan for East Palo Alto's Weeks Neighborhood. The purpose of the planning project is to represent the neighborhood residents' viewpoints with an emphasis on "bottom-up" planning.

Date: March 27, 1996

Time: 5:30-6 p.m. networking, wine and cheese, 6-7:30 p.m. presentation

Location: SPUR Offices, 312 Sutter St., 5th floor, SF

Cost: \$5

BART: Montgomery Station

Parking: Sutter/Stockton Garage

RSVP: NSCCAPA Voicemail
(415) 281-0195

The 3rd Annual "Putting Our Communities Back on Their Feet" Conference

This conference is offered by the Local Government Commission/Center for Livable Communities, and it will be a great setting for community leaders and planning staff to see what opportunities could be in store for their towns. The conference will feature two full days of plenary and break-out sessions, exhibits, video screenings and tours, which have been big hits at the last conferences. Issues to be addressed include how to create cluster housing, jobs, recreation and services, rebuilding existing town centers and neighborhoods, alternatives to auto dependency, reducing infrastructure costs, preserving natural resources and air quality, and restoring communities' economic and social vitality.

Date: April 26-27, 1996

Location: San Francisco

For more information and registration details, please contact Michael Kelso of the Local Government Commission at (916) 448-1198, or by fax at (916) 448-8246.

Spotlight on Industry Conference

The Contra Costa Council Industry Task Force, in cooperation with The Council of Industries, the Industrial Association, Western States Petroleum Association and the Contra Costa Economic Partnership is presenting a half-day conference that will include sessions on business contractor/supplier partnering, industry/community partnering, the Contra Costa Regional Permit Assistance Center, and permitting obstacles and solutions. Speakers include Bill Campbell, President of the California Manufacturers Association, Paul Fassinger, economic forecaster with ABAG, and James M. Strock, California Secretary for Environmental Protection.

Date: March 22, 1996

Time: 7:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Location: Sheraton Concord Hotel

For more information contact Tomi Van de Brooke at Shell Oil, (510) 313-3462.

UC Extension Courses

Berkeley

For course information contact Environmental Management at (510) 643-7143.

Mitigation Measure Development and Monitoring, March 14, San Francisco.

What Dolan Means for Planning Practice, March 29, San Francisco.

Planning in the '90's: Overview and Update, April 11-12, San Francisco.

Wetlands and Endangered Species Laws and Regulations, April 19, San Francisco.

Davis

For course information call toll free (800) 752-0881.

Vernal Pools, Wetlands and Aquatic Habitats, April 11, in-field.

Coordinated Resource Management and Planning, April 16-17, UC Davis.

Understanding Home-Rule: A Practical Legal Primer, April 18, UC Davis.

NEPA Process and Practice: A Step-By-Step Approach, April 24-25, UC Davis.

Oak Woodlands and Serpentine Foothills, April 25, in-field.

Subdivision Map Act, April 26, UC Davis.

Santa Cruz

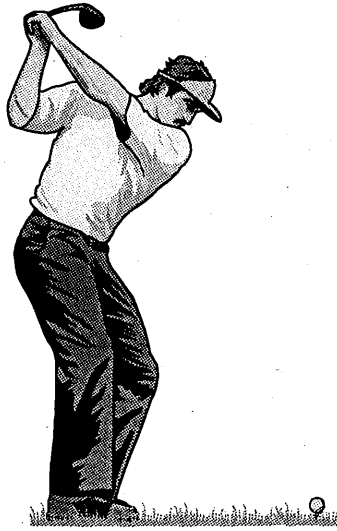
For course information contact Environmental Programs at (408) 748-7390.

Subdivision Map Act Law: A 1996 Update, March 22, Santa Clara.

CEQA: Annual Law Review and Update, March 28, Santa Clara.

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DINNER: \$15.00

CHECK IN STARTS: 11:30 a. m.

For more information, please contact: Linda Rawls (510) 632-8871 Or Curtis Banks (415) 917-1680

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Pacific Municipal Consultants (PMC) is seeking a qualified land use planner to join its rapidly expanding Bay Area and Sacramento operations. PMC is a multi-disciplinary planning and municipal consulting firm with office locations in Pleasanton, San Jose, Monterey, Oroville, and Sacramento. PMC is seeking an individual with a minimum of two years full time professional planning experience in project review, zoning interpretation and analysis, policy preparation and/or environmental review. Experience with agency presentations and/or providing public information in conjunction with public agency employment is preferred. A bachelor's degree in planning, urban studies, political science, or a related field is required. For consideration please submit a resume and references to Mark Rhoades, Senior Planner, 4420 Rosewood Drive, Suite 100, Pleasanton, CA 94588.

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/ 227-4362.

Greenbelt Alliance Endorsing Compact Development Projects

by Peter Cohen

For over thirty years Greenbelt Alliance has been working to protect the Bay Area's environment. Greenbelt has been involved not only in protecting open space, but has also conducted research on how the region can meet its growth and development needs without diminishing its greenbelt, which Greenbelt Alliance considers to be a keystone to the area's quality of life. Since 1990 the Greenbelt Alliance, one of the San Francisco Bay Area's leading environmental organizations, has officially endorsed 17 substantial development projects with a total of over 13,000 housing units. Seem strangely contradictory? It is part of Greenbelt Alliance's effort to encourage development that promotes a more environmentally sustainable pattern of land use in the region.

Greenbelt Alliance has advocated policies to shift development patterns away from auto-dependent sprawl to urban centered, transit oriented, compact development. Greenbelt has consistently pushed for more urban infill and moderate density planning policies emphasizing smaller, more affordable and accessible housing. For instance, they recently supported a specific plan by the City of Mountain View to rezone an industrial area for transit oriented and mixed use development. In this context, Greenbelt's Compact Development Team endorses and supports a limited number of exemplary projects each year. Andrew Butler, who is a landscape architect and the Team's leader, states that, "If we are ever going to save the Bay Area greenbelt, we need to encourage appropriate forms of development in areas close to transit lines."

The Compact Development Team is comprised of individuals from Greenbelt's Board of Directors and several other members of the organization. The team's 15 members bring a variety of expertise and perspective to the project evaluation process. Team members include planners, architects, developers, designers, students, environmental profes-

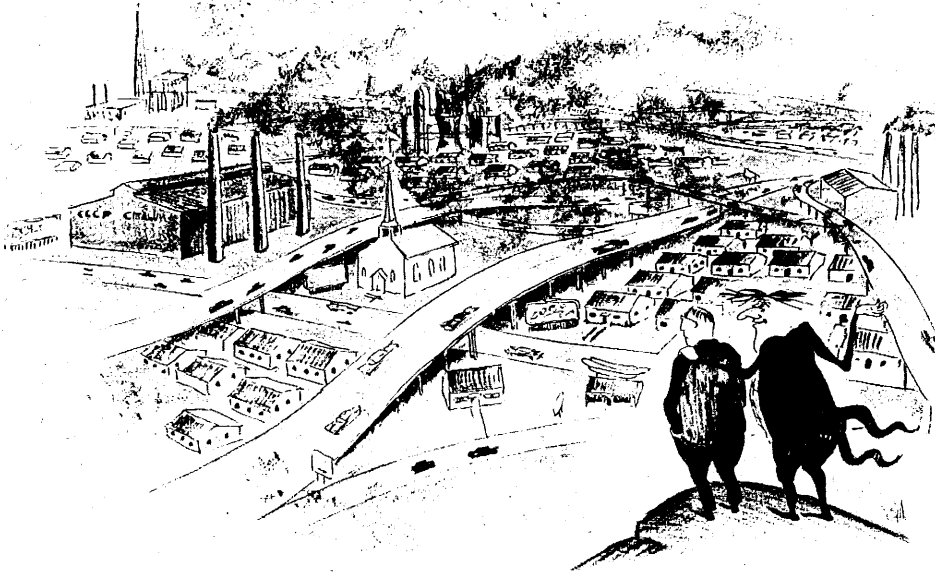
sionals and activists. A formal procedure to endorse compact development projects created a process for Greenbelt Alliance "to go to the development community and say, 'we want to work with you,' and to be involved early enough in the process to be useful," says Trish Mulvey, a member of Greenbelt's executive committee and president of Save the Bay. Larry Orman was instrumental in forming the Team as a means to demonstrate Greenbelt's commitment to appropriate development. He states that, "we wanted to put ourselves on the line by publicly supporting controversial projects, not just the simple ones."

Greenbelt Alliance has established the *Guidelines for Endorsement of Compact Housing Development* for the Team to follow in evaluating and recommending well-designed and located projects. The Team is particularly interested in working with developers in the early planning and/or design stages of their projects, however, they are often asked to take on projects that are well into the permitting process. In these cases Greenbelt requires that the project must have at least cleared the formal environmental review process.

The minimum standard criteria for projects to be considered for endorsement include: **Location** - within an existing urban area; **Automobile Use** - within 1/2 mile of a major transit or job center; **Housing** - substantial housing component if part of a mixed use project; **Minimum Density** - at least 20 units per gross acre; and, **Size** - 50 units minimum.

More specific endorsement considerations are then used to guide evaluations of development proposals and further test projects within the context of good "compact development." Projects are reviewed based on such attributes, for example, as maintaining the greenbelt and urban limit lines, strengthening major metropolitan centers, efficient use of land and creating a diverse

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Without Planning This Would Have Been a Mess

Richard Hedman, "And On The Eighth Day," by Hedman and Bair, APA Press, Chicago

Greenbelt Alliance ...

(continued from page 5)

mixture of housing with an orientation towards regional transit.

Endorsement by Greenbelt Alliance has proven to be persuasive in gaining approval for affordable housing developments, particularly those for which there is organized opposition. Donald MacDonald, an architect in San Francisco, says Greenbelt Alliance "has a reputation of being straight forward and honest, and it provides a sense of objectivity" to the development review process. According to Jim Buckley of the Bridge Housing Corporation, which specializes in affordable housing development, a local chamber of commerce and the Sierra Club "held hands" to support a transit-oriented project in Castro Valley demonstrating the potential for compact development to meet the objectives of disparate interests. "We look for attributes at sites that

Greenbelt Alliance and other environmental groups are also trying to endorse," says Buckley. A Greenbelt Alliance endorsement may come in the form of a letter of support for the project that can be publicly circulated, and in some cases can also include active advocacy of the project or even collaboration with the proponent from the early stages of planning and design. What does Greenbelt Alliance expect in return for its support of good compact development projects? Simply that Bay Area developers endorse the goal of protecting the "greenbelt" and support appropriate Greenbelt Alliance preservation efforts in the future. Executive committee member Trish Mulvey states that, "Having the compact development endorsement process is absolutely essential to our agenda of attaining a sustainable metropolis."

For more information or a copy of the Compact Development Team's 'Guidelines,' call Greenbelt Alliance at (415) 543-4291 or (800) 543-GREEN.

On the Move...

Heidi-Marie Feldman has joined the land use planning, design and environmental consulting firm of EMC in Monterey. Ms. Feldman will be responsible for the preparation of planning and environmental documents.

Richard L. Birkson has joined Economic and Planning Systems as Senior Vice President. Mr. Birkson is experienced in financial analysis and land use plan evaluation, capital improvement programs, and real estate projects. In addition, he will be responsible for designing and implementing an Internet strategy for the firm.

Erin Banks has joined Pacific Municipal Consultants' East Bay planning group. Ms. Banks was formerly with the City of Berkeley advanced planning division.



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MARSHALL DESIGN

NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

March

- 14 NSCCAPA Board Meeting
- 22 Spotlight on Industry Conference
- 27 NSCCAPA Event, Designing for Urban Agriculture and Social Ecology

MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

April

- 20 UC Berkeley Spring Forum and Job Fair
- 26-27 Local Government Commission Conference

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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28	29	30				

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