

Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Planning As If Watershed Conditions Mattered

by Chad Roberts

FEBRUARY 1997

RECEIVED

JAN 30 1997

Ecosystem integrity begins to be degraded when as little as five percent of a basin is covered by impervious surfaces.

As I write, the New Year floods of 1997 have not receded in the Central Valley, and the echoes of the November 1996 Western Regional Urban Streams Conference have not died away in my memory. There's this nagging thought that we haven't got it yet, as far as the relationships go among land use and environmental planning, watershed

dynamics, and aquatic ecosystem integrity. We can surely count of calls to "fix the flooding problems" with more watercourse alterations based on hydraulic engineering principles. Before we go that way we should consider what we have learned in the past 30 years about designing and living with natural ecosystem dynamics, including watershed processes.

The 1997 California floods have much in common with the Mississippi River floods of 1993. These large events tend to surprise people with their power to damage possessions and to cause psychological misgivings. These events are not (or should not be) unexpected in the floodplains of large rivers; one of the lessons of the 1997 floods is that "small" urban streams also should be expected to reoccupy their floodplains when it rains a lot. As in the Mississippi valley, it may be time to reconsider whether land uses highly sensitive to flood damage (such as homes) should be located in California's floodplains.

The November 1996 Urban Streams Conference reinforced another theme relevant to land use planning in California: watershed dynamics on a local scale are an important determinant of this state's overall environmental quality. There is a clear need for an enhanced local planning focus on, and increased local regulation of, land uses which affect watershed elements. This conclusion is clearly shared by natural resource profession-

als, water resource regulators, environmentalists, restorationists, and local residents who want a sustainable local environment. The need for a local focus stems from the relationship between land use and watershed impacts, given the fact that land use regulation is largely a matter of local control in California.

According to the USEPA the water quality effects from "point sources" of pollution (such as factory or wastewater treatment plant outfalls) are now a less severe source of water quality degradation than are "non-point source" (NPS) pollution sources such as construction sites, street runoff, and agricultural areas. In this decade the EPA has published several excellent informational documents (see end notes) about NPS pollution. Unfortunately the enhanced knowledge about NPS pollution has coincided with decreased federal and state funding for pollution control. I do not see any current regulatory efforts to address NPS pollution worthy of its importance from either the federal or the state government.

In addition to water quality concerns, local land uses affect watershed processes by altering watershed hydrology, modifying the natural land cover near streams, and modifying instream conditions. All four factors contribute directly to the biological and physical integrity of urban stream ecosystems. Intensified local land uses usually reduce the local infiltration of precipitation; instead it is concentrated and rapidly delivered to urban streams, which are usually re-engineered to function as drainage conduits. Sediment and other NPS pollutants are rushed into the streams, and potential "obstructions" such as logs and large rocks are removed from the watercourses to enhance their efficiency as conduits. Riparian vegeta-

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DIRECTORS CORNER

by Wendy Cosin, AICP

The Section Board developed a lot of good ideas for new programs and services at our annual retreat. I am pleased to announce that we have already made progress on one of the top priorities— expanded Board membership. In the last few months the following planners have joined the Board and will be contributing energy to help us carry out our good ideas.

- Bulbul Goswami (Oakland Planning Department) is the new Administration Director, responsible for Board information and correspondence.
- Lewis Ames (LS Transit Systems), the new Communications Director, will work to promote planning, APA, events and services.
- Steve Emslie (San Leandro) is the new Membership Director, responsible for assisting new members and developing programs to increase membership.
- Becky Davis is the new student liaison with UC Berkeley.
- Greg Mattson (McGill Martin Self Inc.) is the new East Counties RAC Chair, responsible for providing events and services to planners in the eastern Contra Costa/Alameda areas.

The RACs (Regional Advisory Councils) are a keystone in developing local networks for planners and for bringing programs and services to members within their own geographical areas. One of the changes resulting from the retreat is that Patti Jeffrey, the Professional Development Officer, will concentrate on developing a few major events that will bring the Section more visibility and help us achieve our goal to be more self-sustaining. That means that the RACs will be gearing up and looking for help to organize and plan events. The goals discussed at the retreat were clustered into five major topic areas. Outreach is fundamental for the Section to successfully increase awareness of the importance of planning and provide services to members. Increased advocacy for good planning and the potential for the Section to be a resource clearinghouse for ideas and services could be furthered with increased media exposure and development of a WWW page. The need for the Section to be financially self-sustaining will continue to be an important goal to be achieved by this year's conference, which we plan to be the best ever, and other successful events. Several specific objectives, such as building alliances with other organizations, continuing education, and developing more focused events, a hands-on workshop, and a Planning Summit, fell into a category of project development.

We're making a good start with developing ideas and actions — the more help we have, the more we can do. Please contact any Board member to find out more about getting involved.



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The deadline for submitting articles, news, artwork, advertising and other materials for inclusion in the **Northern News** is the 16th day of the month prior to publication.

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BULLETIN BOARD

Central Bay RAC 1997 Kick-Off Dinner

Have you ever wanted to get more involved in planning-related events but weren't sure how? Have you ever wanted to meet other planners in your area to talk shop over pizza and drinks? If you're a planner in San Mateo County or San Francisco, now is your chance to get involved in helping organize fun and interesting events while meeting new people (or catching up with old friends). Consider attending the 1997 kick-off dinner meeting of the Central Bay Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) on February 20, 1997, at the new microbrewery **The Thirsty Bear** in San Francisco. This will be a great opportunity to discuss ideas for future events and to coordinate with other planners to talk about what's happening in the Central Bay Area. Don't miss the chance to get together in casual surroundings to relax, eat dinner, and have fun!

Date: Thursday, February 20

Time: 6:30 p.m. cocktails, 7:00 dinner

Place: The Thirsty Bear, 661 Howard Street
(between 2nd and 3rd Streets),
San Francisco

RSVP to Andrea Ouse, 415-738-7341 (day)
or 415-359-8564 (message).

NSCCAPA and AIA SF Presents – The Transbay Area Plan

Please join us on Wednesday, February 26th, to learn more about the City's plans for the Transbay Area. Larry Badiner, project manager for the San Francisco Planning Department and Bill Carney, project manager for the Redevelopment Agency will lead a presentation on the proposed Transbay Area Plan. Their presentation will include an overview of the Concept Plan and the Transbay Terminal and will address some of the land use, transportation and urban design features of the Plan.

Date: February 26, 1997

Time: 5:30 p.m. refreshments and networking;

6 - 8 p.m. program

Location: San Francisco AIA Office
130 Sutter St., Suite 600

Cost: \$5.00

RSVP: NSCCAPA Voice Mail:
415/281-0195

Parking: Sutter/Stockton Garage

BART: Montgomery Street Station

NSCCAPA Plans Planning Directors' Seminar

The Northern Section announces a Strategy and Management Leadership Seminar for Planning Agency Directors. It is scheduled for a Friday in May 1997, to be held in the San Francisco Bay Area (location to be announced).

This intensive one-day seminar is specifically designed for leaders of public planning and development agencies. It fills the gap in our training and experience that often emphasizes functional and technical expertise at the expense of management and leadership development. It deals with both the management of an agency and the management of the environment in which agencies work.

This is a creative, hands-on seminar where participants will collaborate with peers and seminar leaders to develop creative techniques to apply in their own work settings.

Who should attend: planning directors, community development directors, economic development directors, environmental agency directors, planning department heads of/in state and regional agencies.

Preliminary cost estimate: \$250 including materials, lunch, and refreshments.

For a brochure with more program details and a registration form, contact Wendy Cosin at 510-705-8108 (WEC1@ci.berkeley.ca.us), Patti Jeffery at 510-524-7980 (Pjeff85233@aol.com), or Michael Neuman at 510-548-7500 (mneuman@ced.berkeley.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 (510) 540-0655.



tion is removed, the land surface is compacted, and the channel is enlarged and straightened. Soon aquatic invertebrate populations are eliminated, the channels carry no flow during the summer, and the aquatic ecosystem is effectively destroyed. In addition, the watershed's ability to detain precipitation is reduced and winter rains swell streamflows to potentially destructive levels on a regular basis.

The effects of development on watershed processes and aquatic/stream ecosystems may be better understood in the Puget Sound Lowlands (PSL) of Washington state than anywhere else in the west. The historical abundance and recent decline of salmonid fish in PSL streams motivated citizens, government regulators, academic personnel, and local government planners to study the effects of development on stream ecosystems and their fish. (It is likely that the listing of coho salmon and steelhead under the federal Endangered Species Act will similarly motivate many Californians.) One result of this decade-long involvement is a truly excellent stormwater management manual for the Puget Sound Basin (see end notes), which should be adapted for and applied to local and regional planning jurisdictions in California.

The 1996 Urban Streams Conference proceedings (see end notes for availability) features a paper by participants (Chris May and others) in the PSL studies, who have identified the percentage of a stream basin covered by impervious surfaces as a primary independent variable in the relationship between development and aquatic ecosystem integrity. Ecosystem integrity begins to be degraded when as little as five percent of a basin is covered by impervious surfaces. When 45 to 50 percent of the basin is covered by impervious surfaces the basin exhibits very low ecosystem integrity. These authors also established that maintaining natural, uncompacted riparian buffers as narrow as 100 feet wide significantly reduced the degradation associated with increasing

impervious cover in the watershed. That is, both the extent and the location of urban development is important in maintaining, enhancing, or restoring aquatic ecosystem functions in urban watersheds.

In my judgment it is necessary and appropriate for California planners to incorporate a greater awareness of these effects into decision-making processes at all levels, especially at local or project-level scales. These effects should not be overlooked in CEQA reviews of project impacts, and mitigation for the effects should be included in project approvals. Residential projects are no less a concern than commercial and industrial projects. Drainage plans should emphasize runoff reduction and onsite infiltration, not a rapid runoff delivery to local streamcourses. Riparian and aquatic ecosystem functions should be maintained, and project reviews should focus on processes rather than mere setting descriptions. Potential aquatic effects may be associated with sites some distance from a stream, and the hydrological and water quality effects of development proposals in the watershed catchment need to be evaluated. All of these concerns can be addressed under the existing authority granted by local land use regulations. Doing so will better manage the environment in urbanized stream basins, and will help in minimizing the consequences of events like the 1997 New Year floods.

Chad Roberts is an environmental planner at Oscar Larson & Associates, Eureka

End Notes:

1. The 1996 Urban Streams Conference proceedings may be ordered from the City of Arcata Environmental Services Department; phone 707-822-8184.
2. The stormwater management manual for the Puget Sound Basin may be ordered from the Washington State Department of Ecology; phone 360-407-6614.
3. EPA publications are available in most libraries or may be order from EPA. Two recommended publications are those numbered EPA/625/R-95/003 and EPA/840/B-92/002.



Senior Transportation Planner

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority

Salary: \$5,052 to \$6,669 monthly

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority is seeking a Senior Transportation Planner. This position is responsible for managing a major functional area in the Planning and Programming Department, and will supervise professional planners and consultants performing transportation and transit-oriented development planning activities. In addition to a four year degree, the ideal candidate would have transportation and land use planning experience, with at least two years in a project lead/manager capacity. For complete information and an application package, contact Personnel at 408-321-5575; 3331 North First Street, Building B, San Jose, California, 95134.

Planner I/II

San Mateo County

Salary: D.O.Q.

San Mateo County seeks a professional planner for its Environmental Services Agency. Responsibilities include researching and analyzing planning data, conducting planning studies, preparing environmental documents, and assisting in land use and zoning administration. The vacancy is in current planning; however, openings could occur in other sections. Experience and a college degree in planning or a closely related field is desirable. For more information and/or an application packet, call San Mateo County Employee and Public Services at 415-363-4343. Application deadline is February 21, 1997 by 5:00 or postmarked by midnight on February 21, 1997.



Associate Planner/Housing Specialist

City of Belmont

Salary up to \$4,615/month, plus excellent benefits

The City of Belmont is looking for a planner with strong interpersonal and technical planning skills who seeks a position in a planning-sensitive community. Graduation from an accredited college or university with a major in urban planning or a closely related field and two years experience in planning with an emphasis in housing or redevelopment, including experience in project review, California Planning law, and report writing. Code enforcement experience, design review experience, and a Master's Degree in Planning is desirable. Apply by 5:00 p.m., Friday, February 21, 1997, at the City of Belmont, 1070 Sixth Avenue, Ste. 301, Belmont, CA 94002. Phone: (415) 595-7438. EOE/AA.

Letter to the Editor

by Hartmut Gerdes, AICP

I am writing regarding a letter to the editor by Bill Clarke, written in response to a Northern News front page article by Eric Parfrey. Mr. Parfrey did not hold back his opinion about certain development projects at the end of his informative piece. This prompted Mr. Clark to ask "if these days the Commentary section actually starts on the front page", and if "the Section has recently paused to consider the type of feature articles it wishes to run on its front page"... Well, we have. Indeed, we thought long and hard how the Northern News might bring about more of a professional discourse that would advance – and stimulate – the art and science of planning and urban design.

Having served as the Northern Section's Communications Director for a few years, and having been closely involved with the revamp and editing of the Northern News, my response regarding the first comment is: "Yes, positively, if the author so desires!" In fact, that is what I and our recent ace Newsletter editors Mark Rhoades and Steve Buckley had in mind, supported by our outstanding Director Wendy Cosin and – before her – Steve Noack. We aimed for the Northern News to brim with well-presented information, reflections and opinions, which challenge and conceivably provoke – and foster enlightened discussion. Getting planners/urban designers

out of their ivory towers, office sanctuaries and city halls – and onto the forum, if you will. We did not want a mini-APA Journal; after all, there is a lot of good writing around. The Northern News should be a forum to discuss new and old assumptions, values and frustrations, that inspire, constrain, and – frequently without being realized by us – permeate our work. Alas, they are often shrouded between the covers of tomes, couched in disclaimers, or remain unspoken for fear of hurting someone, ourselves included.

Beyond fostering – and occasionally succeeding to feature – lively interchanges between planning/urban design professionals, the Northern News is open to related professions and organizations, such as architects and landscape architects, economists, ABAG, MTC, you name it. Furthermore, we invite individuals and organizations whose express focus is to push the goal agenda for tomorrow's habitat and tomorrow's environment, such as Urban Ecology, Greenbelt Alliance, the New Urbanists and SPUR. You are wholeheartedly invited to join our fine new Newsletter editor John Cook at the forum.

P.S. Will the next Lewis Mumford please stand up!

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) 540-0655.

Book Review

by Carol Williams, AICP

Margaret Azevedo, *Environmental Overdose: California's Environmental Law Needs Treatment*

Margaret Azevedo, a self-styled "community activist in Marin County for forty-five years", has written a succinct, pithy little volume about what is wrong with the California Environmental Quality Act and how to fix it. She writes with wit and humor—qualities too rarely present in writings about CEQA. The chapter headings set the tone: "Tiger Salamander Goes to Court," "Shoot Out at Rush Creek."

Azevedo is not without credentials as a CEQA commentator. She served on the Marin County Planning Commission for sixteen years and on the North Central Regional Coastal

Commission for four years. She has been a member of the Board of the State Coastal Conservancy since 1976.

In three case studies she describes what happened to a development application during the EIR process, what can be learned from each case, and what changes she thinks should be made in the CEQA process and its guidelines. Her main point is that the CEQA process has become something it was never intended to be and that it is seriously flawed.

She describes the dissonance between the original California Environmental Quality Act, a fairly succinct text, and the later CEQA guidelines, now running to forty-nine pages and covering subjects not mentioned in the law. She tries to discern the intent of CEQA's drafters, as to whether the law was to apply to private developments and how it was to relate to general plans.

(continued on page 6)

The problem with large bureaucracies

"It is better to be looked over than to be overlooked."

I worked for the Santa Cruz County Planning Department for seven years, and during that time, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Having grown up in the area, I felt privileged to be part of a stewardship that maintains the area's high quality of life.

I had only one complaint during that time. The Planning Department was, by necessity, part of a larger public bureaucracy that barely knew I existed. Instead of receiving an assigned parking spot right away, I had to sign up on a waiting list. At the time I was hired, I was told there would be a three year wait! Dutifully but dubiously, I immediately signed up for an assigned space, and waited. And waited.

Lo and behold, on September 6, 1994, I received the following exciting news from the Santa Cruz County General Services Department: "Congratulations! You have been assigned a parking space at the County Government Center. Starting September 12, 1994, space number 91 will be yours. . ."

The only hitch was that in June 1994 I had tendered my resignation in order to begin working as the Community Development Director of Sand City (where, I might add, I have my own parking space!). Notably, the letter closes with a telling line of bureaucratese: "It is your responsibility to inform General Services whenever changes in employment status occur."

Book Review

(continued from page 5)

The author's conclusion is that at least one of the authors of CEQA intended for environmental review to be incorporated into the general plan. This is her preferred solution to the CEQA problem—to include policies and standards in the general plan which become mitigation for impacts. Development applications would be reviewed against these standards. Those which met the standards would not need to provide additional environmental information. Local governments could require the applicant to submit more studies or analysis if warranted. In promoting this approach Azevedo cites Marin County's general plan as an example of how environmental policies have incorporated the kinds of requirements which are labeled as mitigations in EIRs.

This reviewer is wary of the approach which the author favors. As a planner for local government, I have had to implement many state requirements, one of the most difficult being the state law dealing with housing elements. If the state gave up many of the requirements of CEQA, the trade off would undoubtedly be to develop standards for the conservation element of the general plan and require every county and city in California to submit its general plan to some state agency for certification. The ability of each local government to develop standards appropriate to its local conditions would be impaired and a new bureaucracy would be created. Better the devil we know than the one we might create.

My preference would be to pursue less radical restructuring of CEQA and make some of the following changes which the author recommends: include in CEQA only impacts on the

physical environment, limit response to comments to responsible agencies and new issues raised, limit the definition of a "project" to a physical development on the ground, and eliminate the requirement to analyze alternative sites. Making these changes would continue the legislative reform of CEQA and its guidelines which was partially accomplished in 1993.

In a very interesting afterword Azevedo bravely subjects her book to a critique by a panel of three: David Dubbink, a professor of planning at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo; Peter Grenell, a consultant and former executive officer of the Coastal Conservancy; and Joseph Petrillo, an attorney and former executive officer of the Coastal Conservancy and counsel to the Coastal Commission. The frank discussion by the three commentators is one of the best parts of the book. They challenge the author's positions on CEQA reform and offer their own substantially different views. The afterword leaves the reader stimulated and eager to plunge into the discussion.

Environmental Overdose is a quick read—only 125 pages, including bibliography. Planners, environmental consultants, and attorneys should read it but its primary audience should be California legislators and their staffs. After they have read it, they should draft legislation to continue the task of CEQA reform begun in 1993.

Carol Williams is Assistant Planning Director for the Marin County Community Development Agency. Environmental Overdose is available from Wood Rat Press, 1333 North McDowell Blvd., Petaluma, CA 94954, Phone: 707-769-5100. Price \$8.50 plus tax and shipping.



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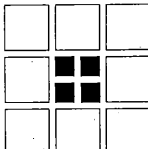
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Urban Design / Planning
 Environ. Impact Analysis
 Development Regulations

P.O. Box 188 (415) 927-2561
 Corte Madera, CA 94976 Facsimile (415) 927-3316



DESIGN, COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT
 DAVID EARLY, PRINCIPAL

2110 A VINE STREET BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94709
 TEL: 510 848 3815
 FAX: 510 848 4315

NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

February

- 6 NSCCAPA Board Meeting, 6:00 pm
- 15 AICP Exam Prep Workshop
- 20 Central Bay RAC Kickoff Dinner, 6:30 pm
- 26 Transbay Area Plan Presentation, 5:30 pm

FEBRUARY						
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	

March

- 6 NSCCAPA Board Meeting, 6:00 pm
- 15 AICP Exam Prep Workshop

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

NEW BOARD MEETING LOCATION

Beginning in 1997, NSCCAPA Board meetings will take place in the brand new Berkeley Permit Services Center at the corner of Milvia and Center Streets in downtown Berkeley. It is approximately 3 blocks from the Berkeley BART, but there is also nearby parking. Bonus: our new meeting room has windows!

APA Northern News
 EDITORIAL OFFICE
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