

# Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

## Keep the "General" in the General Plan Diagram

By Charles Lerable

MARCH 2000

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At a recent general plan workshop that I attended, members of the community expressed frustration about how many times the current general plan had been changed. After all, the comments went, why should we adopt a plan if all planners do is continually change it? These comments have no doubt been heard at countless other community general plan meetings. Plans do need to change for legal and practical reasons, but the public often sees plan changes as slippery political moves to sidestep the public will.

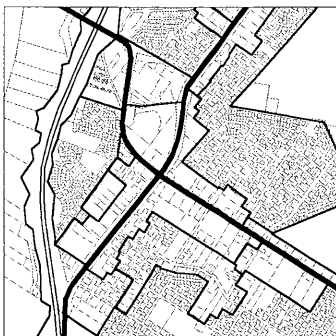
Changes to the general plan map, or "diagram" (a term most planners never use), can be particularly controversial. Planners contribute to the problem by proposing parcel-specific changes that make the diagram indistinguishable from the zoning map. Many planners, community members, and decision-makers like this level of specificity, because a parcel-specific diagram eliminates ambiguity. A property owner can look at such a map and say, "My parcel is located here, therefore I can build four houses on my one acre lot." What's not to like about that? Plans are supposed to make the rules clear, and parcel-specific maps do a superlative job.

The problem is that the general plan diagram is not intended to serve as a specific rule, but as general policy. As planners, we need to go back to general plan diagrams that are more general. We need to dull our pencils, avoid tracing over parcel lines, use bold mapping strokes, resist the urge to leap ahead and make parcel-specific decisions, and avoid too many land use designations. Save the details for the zoning map. Convince the public to hold off. Think big, not small. Neighborhood boundaries and other "edges" can be determined when the zoning map is adopted.

There are some key reasons why general plan diagrams ought to remain general:

1. **No Legal Requirement for Parcel-by-Parcel Specificity.** State law requires consistency between general plans and zoning ordinances, and calls for *general* conformity of zoning maps to general plan diagrams. Nowhere does the law say that a zoning district must equal a polygon on the general plan diagram. In fact, there may be three or more zoning districts for every land use designation on the diagram. There is simply no legal imperative for making general plan diagrams parcel-specific. Indeed, the California Attorney General has determined the opposite, and court decisions have supported this interpretation.
2. **Zoning Map Implements the General Plan Diagram.** Zoning maps should be consistent with the general plan diagram, not the other way around. This may seem obvious, but consistency seems to be cut both ways when plan diagrams mimic, in fact nearly resemble, zoning maps. This "mutual consistency" approach blurs the necessary distinction between policy and regulation. Regulation follows policy; policy should not follow regulation.
3. **Permanence of Plan Diagram; Flexibility of Zoning Map.** The general plan diagram should be resistant to change, whereas zoning map boundaries evolve within the plan's time horizon, expanding and contracting along district edges as circumstances dictate. In other words, general plan diagrams are long-term; zoning maps are short-term. The unpredictable nature

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

by Mark A. Rhoades

There are so many exciting things to write about, that none of them will get the attention they deserve. You will see expanded pieces about some of them in issues to come. The most exciting piece of news is our web site. Yes, you read correctly, the Northern Section has a web site. Thanks to the incredible efforts of Pierce MacDonald and Sowmya Partheserathy, the Board is beta-testing a web site that will be available to members and the general public very soon. Look for more information about this in the next newsletter.

The current economic climate has spurred an unprecedented demand for city planners. There is a wealth of job opportunities in our section (and in Berkeley!). Please take time to look at the positions listed in our newsletter. This is a great time to think about new positions and opportunities, or to get experience in a facet of planning that you may not have considered before.

And finally, I love my job. I know that may sound crazy to some people, especially if you are familiar with the City of Berkeley (my employer). I am the Current Planning and Zoning Manager for a City of 108,000 people, all or whom seem to be either lawyers, politicians, full-time neighborhood activists, or Nobel laureates. What is so fun about this? It makes for a planning environment that is constantly challenging and very complex. There is never a dull moment in Berkeley, and having to really consider every action we take is a refreshing departure from "cookie cutter" planning. One word of caution: don't consider a position in Berkeley if you aren't ready for a public that will actually read your staff reports!

Finally, I want to thank a number of individuals who have recently left the Board. Jeri Weiss-Ram is our outgoing Treasurer. Jeri has done a great job of keeping our books. Chuck Lerable, who was an incredible Advertising Coordinator. Chuck is responsible for setting up an annual billing system for business card ads, and for organizing job ads and billing in a manner that was unprecedented for the Section. We are also saying good-bye to John Banks and Joseph Ferrucci, who have been our Newsletter Editors in the last year (Joseph for just a few short months). Joseph has already moved to New York for a new job and is editing this issue from the east coast! Thanks to all of you for your tremendous service.



## NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

### EDITORIAL

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## BULLETIN BOARD

### APA NEWS RELEASE

## AICP ANNOUNCES THE 2000 CLASS OF THE COLLEGE OF FELLOWS and INDUCTION CEREMONY

The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) is pleased to announce the new Fellows of the AICP College of Fellows (COF). Eighty-two outstanding certified planners were selected in a two-day selection process in Chicago. Over 104 nominations were submitted by APA chapters and AICP members nationwide. Of the 82 fellows, 16 are from California. They include:

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The COF designation is one of the highest honors AICP bestows upon its members for their individual contributions in planning education, research, professional practice, public and community service, and leadership. The COF is primarily concerned with mentorship and future advancement of the planning profession.

The induction ceremony for the new fellows will take place as part of this year's National Planning Conference in New York City. It will be held on Saturday, April 15 at the New York Hilton's Trianon Ballroom, 5:30-9:00 p.m. The ceremony will be followed by catered reception. Tickets are \$75 and can be purchased with conference registration.

For reservations, or for more information about the COF, contact AICP at 202-872-0611; email [aicp@planning.org](mailto:aicp@planning.org).

### APA ELECTIONS

## COUNT YOURSELF IN!

Guide the future of your professional association. Vote in the upcoming elections to choose the leaders of APA and AICP. Ballots will be mailed to all APA and AICP members in early March, so watch your mailbox. Return your ballot by Friday, April 14 to make your votes count!

Positions up for election include: APA and AICP presidents, APA directors, APA board members, and AICP commissioners in Regions II, III, and IV. Candidates' position statements will be included with the ballots and published on the APA/AICP web site at [www.planning.org/members](http://www.planning.org/members).

Exercise your right to vote! APA is counting on your participation!

The Bulletin Board section of the Northern News is intended to provide a forum for individuals to inform members about events or current topics. If you would like to submit an item for the Bulletin Board section, contact the Newsletter Editor at (718) 729-6543.

### APA WEB SITE

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## Keep the "General" ...

of urban development and an evolving economy will affect zoning boundaries, which should be allowed to change within the broad policy context of the plan diagram.

This is particularly true in transitional areas where market forces are redefining district edges and in newly developing areas. We planners should not become secure in the thinking that plan diagrams can be drawn to the precision of a zoning map without inviting plan amendments. The accuracy of designating future land use with such precision is inversely related to the plan's time horizon. If mapped land use designations must change, better it be the zoning map.

### 4. *Less Complication in Meeting*

**Consistency Requirements.** Excessive map specificity on the general plan diagram will inevitably trigger changes in a defensive effort to comply with consistency requirements, generating endless diagram amendments for even the simplest zone changes. To amend the plan diagram each time there is a rezoning negates the guiding effects of the general plan map. In contrast, a generalized diagram can allow for more flexibility in the zoning map. For example, if a general plan policy calls for maintaining a compact commercial center to minimize its impact on surrounding residential areas, the diagram need only show a wavy boundary indicating the general location and extent of the commercial center, in order to be consistent with the policy. Following adoption of the policy and diagram, the zoning map is drawn with parcel-by-parcel specificity, showing the exact location of the commercial-residential edge. This zoning map can change over time and still remain consistent with the original general plan map.

*(continued from page 1)*

By keeping parcel-specific details out of the general plan map (using wavy lines), we are more likely to maintain the long-term integrity of the general plan map. Consistency requirements for rezonings would be less problematic. The public understands the connotations of straight versus wavy lines, and by looking less like the zoning map, a more general diagram would actually be less confusing. By adopting plan maps that are clearly separate from zoning maps, planners and decision-makers will need to make fewer plan amendments. This will help maintain integrity and public confidence in the general plan as a long-term land use policy.

Planners should use as liberal an interpretation of the consistency doctrine as it applies to the general plan diagram. This begins in the map drafting room and should be supported by language explaining that plan maps are not parcel-specific. It is easier to do this with a diagram that does not show or mimic parcel lines. The plan must survive the immediacy and precision of zoning without having to be amended every time there is a zone change.

General plan maps take center stage in land use debates. They become the public's spatial litmus test for land use. And when planners choose to blur the distinction between general plan and zoning maps, they will eventually find themselves in front of another bewildered general plan workshop explaining why citizens should participate in a planning process whose rules constantly change.

*Charles Lerable can be reached at [clerable@redshift.com](mailto:clerable@redshift.com).*



### Two Positions

Nichols Berman

Nichols Berman, an environmental consulting firm located in San Francisco's South of Market Area, is seeking applications for the following positions, both available immediately. Send resume to 142 Minna Street, San Francisco, CA 94105; fax 415-957-1381.

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quires 2 years responsible professional-level experience in municipal or regional planning administration; bachelor's degree in urban planning, architecture, geography, environmental studies, public relations or related field; or equivalent combination of experience and education. Person must be willing to work irregular hours, possibly evenings and weekends. Must have valid class "C" California driver's license. City application required. Deadline: March 6, 2000, 5:00 p.m., no postmarks. For application, contact the City of Santa Ana, Personnel Services Dept., 20 Civic Center Plaza M-24, Santa Ana, CA 92701; phone 714-647-5340. EOE.

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Conference delegates do not need to preregister for most sessions, but we want to know which sessions you plan to attend, so that we will schedule the most popular sessions in the largest meeting rooms. Log your session preferences by visiting APA's web site at [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org). It will take only a few minutes of your time, but will make your conference experience more enjoyable and productive. Room assignments will be made based on the results of this survey.

The National Planning Conference offers more than 200 sessions, 102 mobile workshops and orientation tours, and numerous social events. The New York host committee is ready to welcome you to the Big Apple. The APA conference offers planning professionals and officials the best education opportunity available. For more information on registration, contact Patty Hjertquist at 312-786-6705. To obtain a full list of available conference-related documents, call APA's fax-on-demand service at 800-800-1589.

SAVE ON AIRFARE TO THE CONFERENCE!

United Airlines and Delta Airlines are the official conference airlines. Call United or Delta directly or use your own travel agent and reference the discount code to receive the discounted fares. Call Delta at 800-241-6760 (refer to discount code #132608A) or call United at 800-521-4041 (refer to discount code #567NW). If you purchase your ticket 60 days in advance, you will receive an additional five percent off, for a total discount of ten to fifteen percent.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

I am pleased to announce that Keary Smith will be taking over as *Northern News* Editor. Mr. Smith is a planner with ABAG and eager to get started on the newsletter. He will be editing the April issue of the *Northern News*. It has been a pleasure working on the newsletter over the past few months. I'd like to give a special thanks to Jerry Haag, Juliana Pennington, and Mark Rhoades for their ongoing help with the newsletter.

Best wishes.

Joseph Ferrucci

*Northern News* Editor

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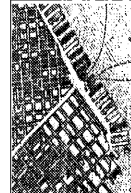
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## March

**6-7** Urban Land Institute Workshops: "Industrial and Business Park Development" and "Multifamily Housing Development." Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco. More information: visit [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org).

**9-10** Urban Land Institute Workshops: "Financing and Investing in Real Estate Projects" and "Shopping Centers: How to Build, Buy, and Redevelop." Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco.  
For more information, visit [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org).

**9-12** Local Government Commission Conference: "Building Livable Communities: Bringing Together People and Nature in Small Towns and Big Cities." Yosemite National Park.  
For more information, visit [www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org)

**20-21** The Complete Management Course for Planning Directors in San Diego. For more information, contact Paul Zucker, AICP at 800-870-6306; fax 619-260-1138; [www.planning.org/educ/complete.htm](http://www.planning.org/educ/complete.htm).

## April

**15-19** APA National Planning Conference in New York City. For information, visit [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org) or [www.nymetro.org](http://www.nymetro.org).

## May

**3-6** National Community Building Network Annual Conference in Los Angeles. For more information, contact NCBN at 101 Broadway, Second Floor, Oakland, CA 94607; web site [www.ncbn.org](http://www.ncbn.org).

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