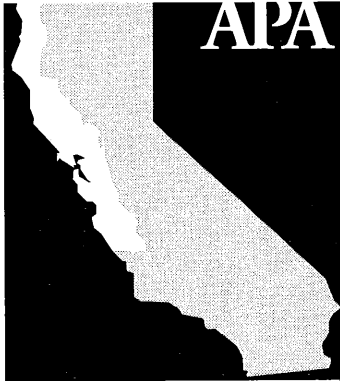


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Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Is Portland the Potemkin Village of Presidential Politics?

By Richard H. Carson

MAY 2000

According to a new national survey, "urban sprawl" is now tied with "crime" as the leading issue in the minds of Americans.¹ So will urban sprawl take a front seat in the presidential debates? Several states have taken the lead nationally in addressing the problems caused by urban sprawl. In the last decade, all of the highest growth states were in the West, but only two of them were bold enough to initiate state-mandated growth management. They were Oregon and Washington. Each grew at twice the national rate.

The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area straddles the states of Oregon and Washington. So is it any surprise that the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area is in the political cross-hairs of the year 2000 presidential campaign? The region is already being portrayed by the conservative right as the political Potemkin village of Al Gore's "Smart Growth" program.² (The term "Potemkin" refers to field marshal Potemkin, who constructed fake villages to please his lover, the Tsarina Catherine the Great, when she toured Russia. And "Smart Growth" is one of vice-president Al Gore's major campaign themes as he tours America.)

So is the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area really Al Gore's Potemkin village? Is the Pacific Northwest—where Oregon and Washington have state-mandated land use planning—a liberal Potemkin territory? Or is it the new progressive Eden?

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN CLAIMS

As the year 2000 presidential race approaches, there is going to be more and more discussion about how we do or don't plan for population growth in our metropolitan areas.

This is a presidential election issue because the large voter states—like California, Florida and Texas—are all struggling with the social, economic and environmental impacts of growth.

The "Smart Growth" rallying cry is a call by which voters can be swayed. The "Smart Growth" sponsors represent an impressive political force. Certainly some of the sponsors can be perceived as socially progressive—if not liberal—organizations. The American Planning Association, American Farmland Trust, Congress for New Urbanism, International City/County Managers Association, National Association of Counties, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Trust for Public Lands are all there. But more recently, private corporations like the Bank of America have also signed on.

Al Gore has staked out "Smart Growth" as a major campaign theme. His campaign website says that, "This January, Al Gore launched a new livability initiative: to help communities across America grow in ways that ensure a high quality of life and strong, sustainable economic growth. The initiative proposes significant new investments to help communities preserve green spaces, ease traffic congestion, and pursue 'smart growth' strategies."³

On the other hand, the leading Republican candidate, George Bush, does not say much about the impacts of population growth or the need for growth management. Bush, who is both presidential candidate and Governor of Texas, has a very brief quasi-environmental statement on his web page that says he: "...believes environmental standards must be based on sound science, solutions based on market driven strategies."

(continued on page 4)

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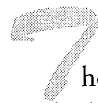
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EDITORS NOTE



The May issue of the Northern News features an article by Richard Carson which examines smart growth policies in Portland, Oregon and their relationship to the upcoming presidential election. The article highlights several impacts growth management has had on both the environment and growth in the Portland-Vancouver region. Also included in this issue is a thoughtful piece by Hartmut Gerdes on the implications of the hybrid electric-gas powered smart car for transportation and land use decisions in the future.



Professional Notes

Randy Anderson, AICP, Landscape Architect, has started his own practice after working 25 years for others, most recently 8 years as Planner for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

Contact him at (650) 620-9623 or randyboz@aol.com for more information.

Darcy Smith. Ms. Smith joined the City of Campbell Community Development Department as a Planner I in November 1999. She previously worked as a planner with the firm of Dyett & Bhatia in San Francisco.

Pamela Tuft, has moved from her position as Planning Director for the City of Petaluma to a newly created position in the City Manager's office, Director of General Plan Administration. In her new role, Pamela will lead a team of department heads and consultants in preparing Petaluma's next General Plan as well as manage special projects for the City Manager.

If you have a professional note you would like to include in the Northern News, send it to: Kearey Smith, 5099 Murchio Drive, Concord, CA 94521; Phone 510.464.7994; email keareys@abag.ca.gov Please limit your note to 40 words.

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The deadline for submitting materials for inclusion in the Northern News is the 16th day of the month prior to publication.



BULLETIN BOARD

THE CALIFORNIA CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS PRESENTS

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION—INFORMAL WORKSHOP Recent Changes in Clean Water Act Regulatory Programs

Presented by

Wade Eakle, Regulatory Program
Manager, South Pacific Division, Army
Corps of Engineers

Doug Pomeroy, Administrative Appeal
Program Review Officer, South Pacific
Division, Army Corps of Engineers

We will discuss recent changes in the U.S.
Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act
Regulatory Program.

1. New Nationwide Permits for discharging dredge and fill material into wetlands and waters of the United States (Federal Register Notice of March 9, 2000). These new Nationwide Permits will replace Nationwide Permit 26, which expires in early June 2000.
2. New Administrative Appeal Program which allows permit applicants to appeal Corps of Engineers permit denials, special conditions on permits, and Corps of Engineers geographic jurisdictional determinations (Federal Register Notice of March 28, 2000).

When: Tuesday, May 16, 2000

11:30 Lunch (will be provided)

12:00 to 1:00 Workshop

RSVP: Karen Frye, Tetra Tech
(415) 974-1221
karen.frye@tetratech.com

Where: US Army Corps of Engineers
South Pacific Division
Division Conference Room #1134
11th Floor
333 Market Street, San Francisco

Cost: Free to members
\$10 for nonmembers

Directions: The 333 Market Street Building is at the corner of Market and Fremont streets in San Francisco, immediately next to the Embarcadero BART Station. To locate our offices and conference room, enter at the middle of the block next to the BART entrance, turn left at the security counter and take the elevators to the 11th floor. For additional information contact Doug Pomeroy at 415-977-8035.



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 (510) 464-7994.

Potemkin Village...

(continued from page 1)

PUBLIC POLICY REALITIES

The Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area has become Al Gore's political showcase. In a recent speech before the Brookings Institution, he said: "Today, the environment is better protected; developers advertise not sprawl but community villages; new developments, crafted with care, boast community spaces, light rail stations, and on-the-block day care; and Portland's community spirit has become one of joy."⁴

Unfortunately, such claims of "joy" are sometimes politically overstated. While in Portland to attend the grand opening of the westside extension of the region's light rail line, Gore claimed before the nation's press that the "...new light rail system attracted 40 percent of all commuters." The mass transit district, when pressed about this miracle, noted it was considerably less than that.⁵

If the Portland-Vancouver area is such a political lynchpin, then the year 2000 election question should be, "Has this laboratory of managed growth produced any worthwhile results?" The answer is not a readily apparent as the political rhetoric. For example:

- The Portland metropolitan area is the 12th most traffic-congested in the nation.
- The Portland-Vancouver area ranked in the top 12 percent of the nation's most unaffordable housing markets.⁶
- The backbone of the region's planning strategy—light rail—has recently failed to pass at the ballot box.
- The City Club of Portland, a decidedly liberal civic organization, produced a scathing report of the city's efforts. It listed a lack of citizen involvement, unrealistic population absorption targets and a lack of a comprehensive vision.
- The Portland area homebuilders—with no "joy" in their hearts—advised all members to boycott building in Portland because of over-regulation.
- Finally, even the spiritual leader of the new urbanist movement, architect Andres Duany, weighed in by speaking "...of the danger of canonizing Portland" and complaining about the "...insufferable sanctimonious tone of the responses, so typical of the Portland cult."

What has state-mandated planning done to make Oregon and Washington a better place to live? Actually, quite a lot.

- The use of urban growth boundaries has minimized the impact of development on agricultural and forest resource lands. Such boundaries also cost-efficiently optimize the provision of new infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer service.

- Urbanization is only allowed to proceed with available urban services. This means that development pays its fair share of the cost of growth and that there is less groundwater pollution in the suburbs because there are less failing septic systems.
- The region has utilized better urban design and the acquisition of existing natural areas to offset the possible negative impacts of densification and to create more livable spaces.
- The use of higher quality mass transit like light rail, while more expensive, makes for a greater livability for peoples of all incomes.
- The Portland-Vancouver area boasts one of the highest personal incomes in the nation, one of the lowest unemployment rates and is an economic development magnet for high tech industries.
- Home ownership rates are the some of the highest in the nation.

On balance, any rational person would conclude that managed growth is a superior public policy to unplanned sprawl, but it is important to understand the limitations of such policies. Planned growth works well when used to achieve reasonable economic, social and environmental objectives. However, it comes at a public cost that bears scrutiny.

Is the Portland-Vancouver area a political Potemkin village? No. On the other hand, the citizens of the Pacific Northwest don't like outside scrutiny. Former Governor Tom McCall once admonished a nation to "Visit, but don't stay" in Oregon. This will be especially true for any presidential candidate, Republican or Democrat, who plays fast and loose in characterizing our corner of America.

Richard H. Carson is the managing editor of the Oregon Planners' Journal and an elected board member of the American Planning Association's Oregon Chapter. He can be reached via the Internet at richcarson@msn.com or through his website at <http://msnhomepages.talkcity.com/capitoldr/richcarson/richcarson.html>.

1 Newsweek Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. April 13-14, 2000

2 Steven Hayward, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, said the Portland area was "the Potemkin village of the smart growth movement" in the National Review.

3 Gore 2000 presidential election website at <http://www.algore2000.com/issues/environ.html>.

4 Vice-president Al Gore, speech to the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., September 2, 1998, on the web at http://www.smarthgrowth.org/index_frameset.html.

5 Statement by Bruce Solberg, spokesperson for Tri-Met, is "I would say that is wrong." He estimated 25 percent was closer, but with a lot of qualifiers.

6 National Home Builders Association, website at http://www.hahb.com/facts/hoi/hoi3q1999_25.htm

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THE COLOR ASPHALT

By Hartmut Gerdes, AICP

Trust you are as pleased as I am to hear about the smart "hybrid" car that will run 80 miles on a gallon of gas, with no environmentally or atmospherically damaging exhaust. It sounds like a planner's dream, doesn't it? The air we breathe will be cleaner, our rivers and lakes less polluted. People of lesser means will be able to afford a car, too. Alas, will smart cars have unintended consequences? Assuming gas expenditure and, consequently, gas price tumble, simpler engines and lighter construction make cars less expensive and more affordable, will more people want to own a car? Or buy a third and fourth one, with one for the teen, thus needing a four-car garage? What will keep us from driving and commuting more and farther? And, with smog scares a thing of the past, will John Q. Taxpayer be inclined to keep supporting public transit at appropriate levels, let alone transit-first policies, in all but the most densely populated urban areas? As a consequence, will there be less transit, and more traffic gridlock? How will it affect regional land use (and I don't mean Saudi Arabia's)? Will we abandon smart growth and New Urbanism—and widen our streets, relax urban growth boundaries, environmen-

tal and open space regulations, and promote sprawl? (Or just pack our telecommute kit, cut ties to any other but the cyber community, and head for the woods?)

Granted, we are looking at least two or more decades down the road, risky in today's fast-paced world. Furthermore, there are increasingly powerful demographic, economic, environmental and public policy forces, with even some of the media on the bandwagon, that have rediscovered downtown and community, and promote urban infill. This after 50 years during which the ratio of regional land grabs in the U.S. has exceeded population growth by as much as seven times. And just when it would appear that the inward-directed forces might get the upper hand over the outward-bound ones, here comes the smart car...

A planner's dream—or nightmare? If there will indeed be more asphalt down the road, how can we square smart cars and smart growth? What's your take?

Hartmut Gerdes, AICP, principal of Square One Productions, is an urban designer who produces photo and videomontages, and videos. Email@ Square One Productions.com.



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NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

May

- 15-19 Bike to Work week
- 16 Bike to Work Day
- 16 The California Chapter of the National Association of Environmental Professionals will be meeting to discuss Recent Changes in Clean Water Act Regulatory Programs.
- 18 ABAG Executive Board meeting to discuss the Regional Housing Needs Determination for the Bay Area.

MAY						
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