



# WHAT'S INSIDE

This two-month issue is the longest in the 33-year history of *Northern News*. To make file sizes smaller and easier to download, we have split the issue into Sections A and B. Clicking a [blue page link](#) under Section A below will take you to the article. Clicking on **SECTION B** will download that PDF.

## SECTION A

### The once and future General Plan

It's time to rethink the General Plan as we know it. State rules governing the Plan have been flexible enough to respond to new technologies and shifting priorities, but we can do better. The General Plan Guidelines and underlying legislative requirements need to be revisited to reflect today's realities and future expectations. [PAGE 1](#)

### Director's note

In his monthly column, Section Director Hanson Hom highlights Northern Section activities and accomplishments in 2011. [PAGE 3](#)

### Distributed renewable energy: Plan on it

Renewable energy in California is booming. California's Renewable Portfolio Standard requires a third of utility retail sales to come from renewable energy sources by 2021. Power—once generated close to the users—is now transmitted over long distances

to population centers. Distributed generation of energy (DG) is a local, cost-effective power strategy that can meet targets for “localized electricity generation.” But development of energy-generating facilities in urbanized areas will pose challenges for urban planners. [PAGE 4](#)

### Urban fabric: Strategies for American cities

The Middle City is a change concept for cities that are neither shrinking nor growing, but are searching for direction. Case studies of former manufacturing cities on the East Coast illustrate adaptations these cities have used to meet 21st Century challenges. Foremost is the use of partnerships to shape compromise, develop funding sources, and enact change within the areas. [PAGE 8](#)

### Mentorship

A review of what worked during the first year of the Section's mentorship program, and a call for volunteer mentors and mentees for 2012. [PAGE 15](#)

### Call for Nominations, 2012 APA–California Northern Section Awards

Awards categories, and where to get the submittal form. Applications are due March 16. [PAGE 12](#)

### Where in the world

Each issue, we publish a photo of urban planning interest and ask you to guess the location. Answer provided somewhere in the same edition. [PAGE 11](#)

### Job ads update

*Northern News* is no longer publishing job ads. Find out why, and where you can post job ads, at no cost. [PAGE 13](#)

### Obituary

Al Boeke, architect and Sea Ranch developer, dead at 88. [PAGE 14](#)

## SECTION B

### Reinventing the GP—worth a look

Members of the California Planning Roundtable are involved in an ongoing process to guide communities in better ways to prepare general plans. Supported by APA California, the California Planning Roundtable has undertaken to “reinvent the general plan” and revitalize it as an essential tool to help California communities tackle 21st Century issues. [PAGE 16](#)

### Plan-it Sustainably

Much as the voluntary performance standards of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) have incentivized the building industry, the new Sustainable Transportation Analysis & Rating System (STARS) aims to promote transportation sustainability. Transportation professionals can use a standard checklist to plan for or to evaluate the full life cycle impact of their efforts on access, climate, energy, and benefit/cost. [PAGE 17](#)

### Who's where

Stay up to date with the major movements of your colleagues and learn about new members of the Northern Section board. [PAGE 18](#)

### HSR notes

Congressional Republicans want to rescind federal funds for high-speed rail. The California Legislative Analyst's Office and others consider California high-speed rail a boondoggle digging a costly hole. Communities along the Central Valley ‘first segment’ and several Peninsula cities are seriously concerned about the rail line's impacts on their communities. Good news for the project: Its latest business plan says the project will generate an operating profit and will not need to rely on government funding for operations. [PAGE 19](#)

### Clean Energy showcase

Four photos of the most cutting-edge energy innovations on the market. From the City of San José “Green Vision, Clean Energy Showcase” in October. [PAGE 21](#)

### Norcal roundup

A sampling of articles from around Northern Section (coastal California from the Oregon border to and including Monterey County and the Bay Area). [PAGE 22](#)

### What others are saying

The synopsis of planning stories from around the country illustrates the breadth of issues that impact our work as planners. The extracts provide a snapshot of the trends that shape our profession, from a potential trade case against Chinese solar panel manufacturers, to national shifts in population, to the latest on redevelopment agencies and water distribution in California. [PAGE 25](#)

### Calendar

Events of interest to planners, December–March 2012. [PAGE 28](#)

### Directory

Board member contacts, newsletter information, address changes. [PAGE 31](#)

## The Year in Review

It is hard to believe that 2011 is coming to a close. Before we launch into 2012, let's reflect on the past year's accomplishments of the Northern Section. First, I am proud to acknowledge our dedicated team of 37 Board Directors who have committed hundreds of hours providing members with a full plate of activities and events during the past 12 months. All of their time was volunteered while they juggled demanding work schedules and competing personal priorities. For some directors, it included becoming a new parent for the first time!

Our core goal is providing cost effective services and events to maximize the benefits that members receive from the portion of their APA dues that are allocated to Northern Section. So where do your dues go? Highlights include the following:

- **Events:** Countless Board hours were spent organizing, sponsoring, and publicizing approximately 85 networking and educational events in 2011. Each month has offered social mixers and professional development opportunities organized by and for APA Northern members. Regional Advisory Council (RAC) Chairs, one for each of the Section's seven sub-regions, ensure that convenient events are planned in each area. We also actively partnered with related organizations such as AEP and SPUR to co-sponsor activities of interest or value to members. From your feedback we know that low-cost and easily accessible AICP CM credits are highly desired. In the past year, the Northern Section sponsored nearly **100 units** of local AICP CM credits for APA members, including courses for ethics and law credits. (See calendar, page 28, for upcoming **law credit course, Dec. 15.**)

Other activities have benefited students and young professionals such as those organized by an active Young Planners Group (YPG). **Natalie DeLeon** and **Lindsey Virdeh** have capably served as the YPG Co-chairs. Lindsey is stepping down. We wish her the very best as we offer a warm welcome to **Avalon Schultz** who has just been appointed the new YPG Co-chair.

A recent successful Northern Section event was *The Current State of Planning: Navigating New Roles*



*and Careers in Planning.* The all-day symposium held on November 5 explored the future of the planning profession and job market. Approximately 100 students and recent graduates attended with participation from experienced professionals in diverse planning fields. Many accolades go to YPG and the SJSU Urban Planning Coalition, particularly **Johnasies McGraw**, all of whom were instrumental in organizing the event.

Many of you attended our annual Holiday Party at the Blu Restaurant in San Francisco on December 9. It is an end-of-the-year tradition partly funded by membership dues. Many thanks to **Darcy Kremin, AICP**, and others who organized this year's successful event.

- **Awards:** An important annual activity recognizes exemplary planning projects and planners in the Northern Section. This year's Awards Program was once again a major success. From a very strong group of nominations, 15 projects and plans were honored with Northern Section Awards at our Awards Banquet in May, and seven went on to receive an Award of Excellence or Award of Merit at this year's Chapter conference in Santa Barbara. **Nominations are now open for the 2012 Awards, so start thinking about submitting a proposal.** (See <http://goo.gl/Wpex8> for details and submittal forms.)

On a related note, the Northern Section was proud to contribute \$4,500 for California Planning Foundation scholarships to Northern Section planning students. Awardees were announced at the Awards Banquet and Chapter conference.

- **Diversity Program:** Supporting diversity in the profession continues to be an important goal of the Northern Section. Diversity Co-directors **Miroo Desai, AICP**, and **Kay Cheng** reached out to high schools to introduce students to the planning profession. They also organized social mixers for planners of color. The Northern Section is also involved in promoting diversity initiatives at the Chapter level. A highlight was the Diversity Summit at the chapter's annual conference.
- **Newsletter:** If you are reading this now, you have noticed the high quality of our newsletter which is published 10 times a year. We strive to provide timely, relevant, and topical information for Northern Section planners. We continually strive to improve the content,

(continued on next page)

appearance, and delivery of the newsletter, which has now grown to more than 20 pages. The newsletter is primarily a volunteer effort overseen by a hardworking three-member editorial team led by **Naphtali Knox, FAICP**, with numerous content contributors. Articles from members are always welcome.

- **eNews:** Complementing our newsletter, the *eNews* is sent twice a month to remind members of upcoming events and activities. As an added service, RAC Chairs have begun sending focused emails to members in each RAC subregion, and we are actively posting announcements on our *LinkedIn* and *Facebook* pages. **Brenna Moorhead, AICP**, Membership Director, who has produced the *eNews* for the past two years is turning over the reins to **Rodrigo Orduña, AICP**. We thank Brenna for her exceptional service and welcome Rodrigo as the new Membership Director.

The above is a brief snapshot of 2011 Board activities and priorities. We look forward to planning for 2012 at our annual retreat in January. Participation in Board activities, and ideas and suggestions for improving services to members are most welcome. Please feel free to contact me at [hansonapa@gmail.com](mailto:hansonapa@gmail.com). ■

The South Bay led the nation in job growth — 3.2 percent over the past year.

<http://bit.ly/s39HEV>

## Distributed renewable energy: Plan on it

By Josh Hohn, AICP

We remain in a boom time for renewable energy in California. The recent frantic pace of large-scale development may be letting up somewhat, but there is little doubt that projects will continue to be built. It also appears that more of these projects will be smaller in scale and closer to our cities and neighborhoods (“load centers,” in energy industry parlance). Placing renewable energy facilities closer to — perhaps even integrated into — load centers will be a matter of both policy and practicality. It will also be an opportunity to rethink the relationship between our built environments and the sources of the energy upon which we are widely dependent.

California’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requires that 33 percent of retail sales from all utilities, electricity service providers, and community choice aggregators will need to come from renewable energy sources by the end of 2020. A limited amount of the 33 percent will be imported from out-of-state sources or come in the form of Renewable Energy Credits. A more substantial, though still minor, portion will come from continued installation of solar panels on residential rooftops. But it is the large, utility-scale projects, the thousands of wind turbines, and the millions of solar panels that have been placed atop, within, and among California’s mountains, deserts, and farmland that most tangibly and strikingly demonstrate the recent renewables boom and the push to meet the RPS goal.

This is not likely to last. The RPS target is among the most ambitious in the country. In 2010, 17 percent of electricity from the three major utilities in California came from RPS-eligible sources. Unless we include in the 2020 totals the projects that have entered into Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with utilities but have not yet been built, the RPS target may not be met. This is because it is very hard to build large solar and wind facilities in California. Here’s why:

- They are expensive. Total development costs can range into the billions of dollars (and most federal Renewable Electricity Production Tax Credits are currently scheduled to expire in 2013).
- Lengthy permitting processes typically involve multiple agencies and must address any number of potential environmental effects. Impacts to certain habitats can be especially controversial and mitigation especially expensive. Ask solar developers in the Mojave about that. In the San Joaquin and Antelope Valleys, underutilized farmland often serves as foraging and nesting habitat for protected species. Further, there is mounting pressure from local communities to strengthen efforts to preserve prime farmland. A recent public hearing in Kern County, which impressively rivals Texas in its aspiration to approve renewable energy projects, revealed strong interest in increased rigor in determining which agricultural lands should be off-limits to conversion for any other use, including renewable energy.

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## Distributed renewable energy: Plan on it

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- Produced energy must often be transmitted over long distances. A project that cannot connect to the electrical grid, due to the cost of transmission construction or an inability to obtain necessary easements, is simply not feasible.

These challenges — especially the environmental and transmission issues — underscored the rationale for Governor Brown's Clean Energy Jobs Plan, <http://1.usa.gov/rZjGlz>. Released in July 2011, the plan proposes to develop 20,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy in California by 2020 and create half a million jobs. (One generated MW is enough electricity to power the instantaneous demand of approximately 750 homes at once.) Of this target, 12,000 MW are to be "localized electricity generation," defined as "onsite or small energy systems located close to where energy is consumed that can be constructed quickly (without new transmission lines) and typically without any environmental impact."

Under the plan, solar systems of up to 2 MW would be installed on the roofs of warehouses, parking lot structures, schools, and commercial buildings. Solar projects of up to 20 MW would be developed on public and private property throughout the state. The California Energy Commission staff analysis of the Governor's plan (<http://1.usa.gov/sPv2Q7>) assumes that biomass, geothermal, wind, fuel cell, and small hydroelectric technologies could be deployed along with solar energy projects.

This is distributed generation of renewable energy.

Distributed generation (DG) is distinguished from the "central station" model, in which large-scale power plants are located in a single, often remote, location, and the generated electricity is transmitted over long distances to load centers. With DG, the power is generated near or within the load centers (the urbanized areas). Among the benefits of DG (summarized by Al Weinrub, in "Community Power: Decentralized Renewable Energy in California," <http://bit.ly/vEUr8X>) are an increased cost-effectiveness (lower environmental and transmission costs, decreased costs of materials), local economic benefits, fewer environmental impacts, shorter development periods than projects requiring new transmission, and increased energy security.

Distributed generation of renewable energy also figures into two fairly recent trends in energy and community planning: Smart Grid initiatives and EcoDistricts.

- Smart Grid initiatives seek to improve the reliability of the power grid through a variety of measures. PG&E's Smart Grid Plan (<http://bit.ly/vTo82e>) specifies in-home energy management, demand response, time-of-use pricing, and support of residential rooftop solar installations.
- EcoDistricts, as defined by the Portland Sustainability Institute (<http://bit.ly/sQd9z0>), are the outcome of a comprehensive strategy to accelerate sustainable development at a neighborhood scale, integrating building and infrastructure with community and individual actions.

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## Distributed renewable energy: Plan on it

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Locally generated energy is a key component in each of these concepts: it helps stabilize available energy for the Smart Grid and it provides energy autonomy and resilience for EcoDistricts.

All of this begs the question: why are we not already seeing widespread DG in California, with rooftop solar on warehouses and district-scale facilities?

An oversimplified answer is that it is a regulatory issue. Current net metering arrangements emphasize energy savings, as opposed to establishing a revenue stream for investors. This limits development of rooftop solar mostly to individual residences that are mostly just able to reduce their utility bills. And developers of other DG projects — “wholesale” projects that sell electricity to local utilities — face many of the same risks as developers of large, central station projects, without the benefit of the larger potential return on their investment.

The CLEAN Coalition (“Clean Local Energy Accessible Now,” <http://bit.ly/vYmEke>) promotes the adoption of programs and policies that address these disincentives to DG. Their approach effectively reframes the notion of the “feed-in tariff,” providing long-term contracts for the sale of energy to electric utilities and creating a more efficient, certain, and transparent process for grid interconnection, while removing substantial barriers to renewable energy development.

So, let's assume that the Governor's call for 12,000 MW of distributed renewable energy is heeded. Let's also assume that smart grid initiatives and sustainable neighborhood planning efforts such as EcoDistricts boost the need for, and interest in, distributed renewable energy. And let's further assume that CLEAN contracts are embraced and the developers of distributed energy are able to realize a reasonable rate of return on their investment, whether a warehouse rooftop solar installation or a 20 MW biomass facility. How might these new energy production facilities near and within urbanized areas affect the built form of our cities and communities?

Certainly, incorporating energy-generating capabilities into new and existing structures will meet a portion of the DG goals without substantially altering anything more than a building's roof or façade. But a wide variety of renewable technologies, with a wide variety of space and structural requirements, will likely be necessary, too, and the characteristics of preferable sites will vary. Issues related to land use, zoning, and community design are therefore likely to arise. The development of any new energy-generating facilities in urbanized areas — even using renewable technology and limiting it to neighborhood or district scale — poses planning-related challenges.

These challenges present great opportunity. Historically, many cities included power plants at or near their centers. While presumably an undesirable use today, those still in operation serve as daily reminders of where everyday energy comes from, and some have evolved into good examples of how infrastructure can weave itself into relatively densely populated areas.

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## Distributed renewable energy: Plan on it

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Cities and counties will need to be thoughtful in drafting ordinances that allow renewable energy at smaller scales in developed areas. Many jurisdictions have developed or are developing exactly that type of guidance, as summarized by the APA in the *PAS Essential Info Packet for Planning and Zoning for Solar Energy*, <http://bit.ly/v5ApYT>.

There also may be occasions to design renewable energy-inclusive communities from scratch; one such example is UC Davis' recently completed West Village community.

How, then, can current and future planning documents anticipate the integration of renewable DG into existing urban areas?

For example:

- What urban design principles could be utilized to facilitate the assimilation of new infrastructure into these areas, or should they be assimilated at all?
- Could projects like this figure into economic development plans or climate action plans, and what are the implications for public health?
- To what degree should projects, over time, be visible or invisible?

And more speculatively:

- Could a cluster of wind turbines on a community's periphery function as an informal greenbelt?
- Would CLEAN contracts allow for "pop-up" solar on temporarily vacant urban lots?
- Will our future parks also be our urban power plants?

The Planners Working Group on Energy and the Built Environment is exploring these issues. Along with occasional speaker and panel presentations similar to those made in 2011, the next year will afford opportunities to delve more deeply into topics that are of interest to working group members with the hope that any output produced as the result of this investigation will be of use to the planning community. While the working group has been loosely organized under the auspices of APA California-Northern Section, we welcome the participation and involvement of all interested parties.

*Josh Hohn is a solar permitting specialist and aesthetics/visual resources planner. He lives and works in Oakland. Comments on this article or inquiries about the Working Group on Energy and the Built Environment can be sent to [jnhohn@gmail.com](mailto:jnhohn@gmail.com).* ■

The problem of electricity surpluses driven by [renewable] power sources whose output cannot be scheduled is emerging around the country. Electricity production and consumption must be matched precisely at all times, and a surplus can cause blackouts just as a shortage can. <http://nyti.ms/sVS0Dd>



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## Urban fabric: Strategies for American cities

By Alexis Canter, ASLA; Gina Ford, ASLA; Brie Hensold, Eamonn Hutton, ASLA; and Pontus Lindberg, AICP

Despite major reinvestment in urban centers over the past two decades, many formerly vibrant American cities are still struggling to reinvent themselves after the decline of their industrial base. Academics and design practitioners have offered countless interpretations of this trend, often classifying cities into neat categories such as: MegaCities. Shrinking Cities. Rustbelt Cities. Cities of the Future. The Sustainable City. Few have focused on the realm of the “Middle City,” operating somewhere between these definitions, with economies and populations that are leveling out, stagnant.

These cities — neither shrinking nor growing — are searching for direction. Should they focus on attracting a new single industry? Should they scale back and shrink smartly? Should they build infrastructure and housing to cater to a commuter population? As designers and planners, our task is to help these cities plot a course, but we rarely get the chance to step back from our projects to investigate the larger social, environmental, and economic factors that influence cities.

Last year, Sasaki Associates launched a research project focused on this area of inquiry. The project, called “Urban Fabric,” probed the question: What happens to a city when industry leaves?

### Research cities

Project Directors Eamonn Hutton and Alexis Canter decided to focus on American cities that participated in the textile industry as prototypes of the broader network of declining industrial centers. Their study explored the social, economic, and environmental conditions of three specific textile cities: Fall River, Massachusetts; Mobile, Alabama; and Newark, New Jersey.

Each of these cities participated in the production of textiles in a unique way. Fall River was a booming mill city with four large clusters of mills along the city’s rivers. Newark was home to many of the country’s most skilled producers of synthetic dyes. Mobile was a key port in the global cotton trade. Textile production profoundly impacted the physical and social landscape of these cities — and indeed America as a whole. By the mid-20th Century, following the general trend of industrial migration, textile production largely moved overseas in search of cheaper labor and lower material costs.

While unique challenges existed in each of these former textile cities, ranging from contamination to flooding, four common themes connect these diverse economic, urban centers.

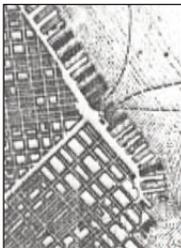
- First, each of the cities retained disused infrastructure, which continues to present challenges to successful redevelopment. In Fall River, for example, there are 10 million square feet of former textile mills, many of which are vacant or underutilized.

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## Urban fabric: Strategies for American cities

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- Second, each of the cities has a strained relationship with its surrounding natural systems — in particular, hydrology. In Mobile, the waterfront has historically been the center of the economy, but storm damage and climate change threaten its long-term sustainability.
- Third, social inequities undermine the sense of community, safety, and welfare in the research cities. In Newark, for example, decades of crime and poverty have deterred investment, which, in turn, has exacerbated the situation.
- Lastly, the three cities and their workforces still struggle to fill the economic void left by former industries. New employment opportunities rarely offer the same number of jobs that traditional manufacturing provided. As of October, Massachusetts state data shows the unemployment rate in Fall River (12 percent) is nearly twice the state average (6.8 percent).

Each city demonstrates the misalignment between 20th Century infrastructure and 21st Century notions of sustainability. In an era of increased emphasis on long-term sustainability, the form of urbanism born out of the textile industry — massive single-use buildings, proximity to water, and free-flowing systems of waste — presents a great challenge for “Middle Cities.”

### Exhibitions and Lecture Series

Aided by an interdisciplinary team from Sasaki, Hutton and Canter brought together their independent analysis with commentary from academics, practitioners, and policy experts from across the country. The research culminated in an exhibition and lecture series which ran from April 4 to May 6, 2011, at Sasaki's gallery and attracted hundreds of guests interested in the post-industrial American city.



Opening night of *Urban Fabric* at Sasaki's Watertown office. *Urban Fabric* was on display in Sasaki's San Francisco office from November 3–December 16.  
Photo: Mary Lewey, Sasaki

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The problem with San Francisco's skyline is that it's been shaped by politics as much as sensible urban planning. It's the reason The City has so few beautiful new buildings and even fewer signature ones. —Ken Garcia,

<http://bit.ly/rUE3Tw>

## Urban fabric: Strategies for American cities

(continued from previous page)

The lecture series identified new models of practice and discourse to address a changing terrain of urban challenge.

**Pierre Belanger**, of Opsys Design and the Harvard Design School, discussed the challenge of the significant global, urban population living within estuarine conditions in the context of climate change and rising sea levels.

**Brent Ryan**, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Architecture, described the need for new typologies of urban infrastructure, economy, and neighborhood structure within the shrinking American city.

**Janne Corneil**, an urban designer and Principal at Sasaki, described the role of innovative, academic, and public partnerships in new forms of city making.

Photos of the exhibit, digital copies of the content and videos of the lectures are available at the project website:

[www.urbanfabricproject.com](http://www.urbanfabricproject.com).

### Strategies

In response to the challenges outlined in the research, and in addition to the precedents discussed in the lecture series, the Urban Fabric project presented a selection of case studies that serve as successful strategies for positive change in America's "Middle Cities." Addressing a variety of scale — from the multinational to the site-specific — these strategies are examples of successful policy, planning, and design initiatives from around the world that transform the challenges of industrial urbanism into sustainable trajectories for the future.

For example, the Rubbertown Corridor Economic Development Strategy — conducted by Philadelphia's Interface Studio for Rubbertown, Kentucky — brought together private chemical industries, metro-area governments, and residents to alleviate the friction between residents and nearby industries caused by environmental contamination. The study's goals include improving the quality of life for residents, while exploring opportunities for local manufacturers to introduce sustainable practices and increase their long-term competitiveness. Although they often differ in both scale and project scope, the case studies illustrate how solutions need to combine innovative partnerships, political capital, system wide thinking, and the transformative power of design.

### Research in practice

While common issues occur across these cities, there is no single solution that can be applied uniformly. Planners, designers, policy-makers, and community members need to work together to create a comprehensive strategy that addresses the range of issues these cities confront. The Urban Fabric research and exhibit foster discussion

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## Urban fabric: Strategies for American cities

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and dialogue, search for common themes, explore applied strategies, and, most importantly, begin to frame the problem.

Common among many of the case studies was the effort to create new partnerships in order to shape compromise, develop funding, and enact change, such as the collaboration at Rubbertown. In a world of increasingly tight financial and environmental resources (and more active public engagement), partnerships play a key role in professional practice.

As we work, we're learning with cities that successful transformation is often the result of partnerships that allow regional collaboration or engage citizens and businesses in revitalization. Urban Fabric gave our office the opportunity to create new intellectual partnerships with academics and other practitioners, and we look forward to keeping this dialog open.

*The authors are practitioners at Sasaki's Watertown and San Francisco offices.* ■

## Where in the world?



Photo by Ella Samonsky (Answer on page 18)

Over the next 30 years, San Francisco should absorb a big share of future growth. Where better to add a large portion of the region's projected 770,000 new housing units and 1 million new jobs than in walkable urban areas where residents have access to sustainable transportation?

—SPUR, <http://bit.ly/uoWApZ>

# Call for Nominations 2012 APA–California Northern Section Awards

Now is the time to think about those plans, projects, and programs that you want to celebrate! An application form and submission details are provided at <http://goo.gl/Wpex8>. Applications are due Friday, March 16, 2012.

We invite you to apply for an award in one of the categories below:

## Outstanding Planning Awards

- Comprehensive Planning
- Planning Implementation
- Planning Project
- Innovation in Green Community Planning
- Focused Issue
- Best Practices
- Grassroots Initiative
- Neighborhood Planning

## Distinguished Leadership and Service Awards

- Distinguished Leadership
- Distinguished Service

## Planner Emeritus Network Honor Awards

### Planning Achievement Awards

- Advocacy/Social Change/Diversity Planning
- Contribution to Women and Families
- Education Project
- Academic Award

## Journalism and Media Awards

## Environmental Awards

The Awards will be presented on Friday, May 11, 2012. Please contact Awards Co-Directors Eileen Whitty at [ewhitty@ebmud.com](mailto:ewhitty@ebmud.com) or Andrea Ouse at [Andrea.ouse@isa-assoc.com](mailto:Andrea.ouse@isa-assoc.com) for more information. ■



Worth a look: Seattle Comp Plan 2011, short video, 6:30. (Set to HD and go full screen.) <http://bit.ly/vivi1S>

## The once and future General Plan

(continued from page 1)

As the spectrum of topics has grown, general plans have drifted from their original mission (not necessarily a bad thing). We have more holistic plans that recognize the interconnected nature of development issues. But where do we stop? Among the topics now addressed in general plans are juvenile justice, educational quality, and health care. Venturing into such subjects puts planners in the position of drafting policies they cannot implement.

More significantly, subject creep has led to extremely long plans. It is not uncommon today to find general plans that exceed 1,000 pages or consist of multiple volumes. Their bulk reduces their utility and accessibility. The answer is not to stop planning for these topics, but rather to recognize that the general plan may not be the best place for them. The general plan should not become the clichéd kitchen sink for every municipal policy document.

**3. Evolution of the map.** The general plan diagram was conceived during an era of colored pencils and press-on letters. It was intended to be interpreted broadly and designed to be legible on an 8.5 x 11 page or a foldout. Even our General Plan Guidelines emphasize the generalized nature of plan diagrams and their intent as a foundation for more detailed zoning maps.

GIS has made general plan diagrams precise, to the point they effectively have become zoning maps. Designations are snapped to parcel lines, reducing any element of uncertainty. This is magnified (figuratively and literally) through online PDF files that enable Internet users to zoom in on their properties.

The response of some general plans has been to develop a new family of diagrams to convey the big picture in a way the old plan map no longer can. These plans feature “change maps” which highlight areas that will grow and areas that will stay the same, and “strategy diagrams” that illustrate future city form. Such maps complement the general map nicely, and can communicate the plan’s intent in a more understandable way.

**4. Telescoping geography.** General plans in California’s counties and larger cities cover vast geographic areas. Plans covering the entire jurisdiction are often so broad that they do not provide enough detail to guide localized decisions. These jurisdictions may resort to multiple geographic tiers in their plans, telescoping from the city (or county) to planning areas (which in aggregate comprise the entire jurisdiction) or to “focus areas” which may comprise just a few large parcels.

For example, Fremont’s new plan contains a 200-page “Community Plan Element” which divides the 90 square mile city into 11 subareas. Each subarea is profiled in the Element, and place-based policies are provided. Within each subarea, smaller “special study areas” are discussed. A benefit of this approach is that it provides a framework for existing area plans and a context for future area plans. It also helps make the plan more meaningful for residents. The downside is that the plan can become overly specific and lengthy.

**5. Fiscal distress.** The framework for the modern general plan was established long before fiscal crises gripped local governments. There

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## Job ads update

Northern News is no longer publishing job ads. Instead, as a free service to its members, APA California Northern Section is posting relevant job ads via the LinkedIn APA Northern Group, <http://linkd.in/tMwfnm>. We will also continue to feature job ads on our website, <http://bit.ly/uyq63G>. **All job ad postings are free of charge.**

Public agencies and private companies wishing to advertise employment opportunities to members of the planning, environmental, and related professions should complete the form at <http://bit.ly/tAXWhl>. Employers may also submit their ad copy to Darcy Kremin, AICP, at [darcy.kremin@cardno.com](mailto:darcy.kremin@cardno.com). ■

MTC's cost-benefit analysis confirmed that the benefits of BART to Silicon Valley heavily outweigh its considerable costs, and it performs extremely well on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transportation costs.

—Sam Liccardo, <http://bit.ly/w43QpS>

## The once and future General Plan

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even was a time when federal grants were provided for preparing general plans. Even as resources shriveled, the cost of doing a general plan ballooned. One to two million dollar price tags are now common in mid- and large-sized cities.

Fiscal distress has impacted general plan practice in several ways. More communities are deferring their plan updates, treating the plan's horizon year as the target for updates rather than updating on a five- or ten-year cycle. Others are doing "housekeeping" updates which simply edit baseline data and projections while carrying existing policies forward.

Cities are also seeking creative ways to conduct their plan updates. Some are preparing their plans in-house or hiring limited-duration contract planners. Others are hiring consultants — not to write their plans, but to train staff in plan writing and procedure.

**6. The role of CEQA.** When it comes to general plans, CEQA often feels like the tail wagging the dog. The EIR routinely consumes a larger share of the budget than the plan itself, and its findings can become the primary focus of the general plan effort. At best, CEQA provides technical rigor and gives plans a strong, defensible factual basis. At worst, it takes the imagination out of planning and shifts the focus to a series of baffling analytical and legal machinations.

Traffic modeling is the biggest culprit. We build, run, and tweak the model, and run it repeatedly, relying on tenuous assumptions to reach conclusions that will shape countless future decisions. Air quality, greenhouse gas analyses, and noise studies bring more black boxes to the mix. This volleys the conversation away from planners and into the court of engineers, scientists, and attorneys. The shift has become more pronounced since the advent of climate change legislation and new air quality rules.

The answer is not to abandon general plan EIRs or to diminish the role of CEQA. However, we should make sure the Plan drives the EIR and not vice versa.

**7. RHNA, RHNA, RHNA.** The last decade has seen ascendance of the housing element as a driver of the general plan update. Housing— always the oddball element—must be certified by the State, updated on a regular schedule, and structured to satisfy a rigorous checklist. The Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process, along with other legislative requirements, has pushed this element even further to the fringe.

For many communities, preparing a housing element has become a high-stakes game with HCD. Cities and counties pursue their certification letter with vigor, offering excruciating detail on obscure topics to satisfy State reviewers. This single element has become almost as lengthy as all other elements of the General Plan combined. Worse, cities concoct policies and actions that may not reflect local context. The fundamental role of the general plan as a broad "constitution" for development has given way to the ordinance-like quality of this element.

The upside is that the Housing Element keeps local governments on their toes. The RHNA process compels cities to address social equity and smart growth, and to maintain a regional perspective as they plan. Additional flexibility at the State level would improve the process and enable more realistic housing solutions.

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## OBITUARY—Al Boeke, Sea Ranch developer, 88

While flying along the Sonoma Coast 100 miles north of San Francisco in 1962, architect and planner Al Boeke envisioned a residential community that would blend with and preserve the area's natural beauty. A year later, as vice president of planning and development for Oceanic Properties (a division of Castle & Cooke, a real estate entity of the Dole Food Company), Mr. Boeke purchased the land and assembled a design team. Principal designers included Bay Area architects Charles Moore, Joseph Esherick, William Turnbull, Jr., and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. Their vision led to the development of Sea Ranch, founded in 1965.

Sea Ranch now has a population of 1,305 (2010 Census) and just over 1,800 homes, including one owned by Mr. Boeke. He died there on Nov. 8.

Alfred A. Boeke was born in Denver, Nov. 20, 1922. His family moved to California, and he received his bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Southern California in 1948.

See Dennis Hevesi, "Al Boeke, architect who sought ecological harmony," *The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2011, <http://nyti.ms/vUAzul>. Also see Wikipedia, "Sea Ranch, California," <http://bit.ly/sXj22N>. ■

To suggest that redistricting can ever be entirely divorced from politics is overselling the case. Death, taxes, and lawsuits in redistricting are the only things certain in life. —Keesha Gaskins, *Brennan Center for Justice*, NYU. <http://usat.ly/vN72zG>

## The once and future General Plan

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**8. Measuring progress.** Measurement has always been an essential part of shorter-range strategic planning. It has had less of a role in comprehensive planning, which focuses on long-term, intangible outcomes. A number of factors have brought the two closer together, with general plans now placing more emphasis on measurable results.

The Housing Element, for example, requires quantified objectives for production and assistance. Greenhouse gas emissions measurements, solid waste diversion rates, VMT reduction, and walkability scores have also found their way into plans. Public demand for government accountability is driving the demand for measurement, and has given rise to "scorecards," budgets, and capital improvement programs within plan documents.

**9. Bye bye LOS.** For years, roadway level of service (LOS) provided the basis for land use choices, transportation plans, growth management strategies, and capital improvement programs. LOS was the undisputed benchmark for determining how much growth a city could support and where it should occur.

Today, planners and elected officials are rejecting LOS or replacing it with new benchmarks that recognize more than vehicle speed and delay. Standards are being developed to consider transit, bicycle, and pedestrian trips, with the goal of creating multi-modal transportation systems. Where this brave new world of transportation planning will lead us is still unclear.

**10. Public input.** Rounding out the top 10 is the changing concept of public input in the planning process. Input used to be solicited through newspaper-advertised town hall meetings.

It is hard to attract participants to such meetings today, and planning meetings are often populated by (affectionately) "the usual suspects." When we do attract a crowd, participants are focused on their short-term needs. Rarely are they willing to ponder what their city should be like in 20 years.

Meanwhile, the Internet and social media are revolutionizing public participation, reaching audiences that public workshops never could. Commission meetings can be streamed at any time of the day or night. Input is provided through online surveys, links to general plan websites, blogs, and tweets. General plan updates have their own Facebook pages and YouTube videos. Planning has become accessible to everyone, giving planners a unique opportunity to educate and learn at the same time. We've only just begun to explore the limitless opportunities.

**WHAT'S NEXT?** Even with all the above, the general plan framework created four decades ago has been remarkably resilient. The legislation of the 1970s gave us great latitude in plan drafting and organization. This flexibility has also allowed cities and counties to adapt their plans to changing times and evolving priorities.

Where we go next is another question and perhaps the topic for another article. Updating the General Plan Guidelines is an important first step. At the same time, we should start rethinking the template we've been using for the last four decades. In doing so, we can put California back on the cutting edge of national best practices and ultimately allow planners to better serve their communities.

Barry Miller, AICP, is a planning consultant in Oakland. He can be reached at [Barry@BarryMiller.net](mailto:Barry@BarryMiller.net) ■

# Mentorship program starts its second year in February

## Application deadline is January 6

By Emy Mendoza

Matching young planners with experienced professionals, APA California Northern's Mentorship Program offers professional development through networking, the exchange of professional ideas, and guidance to young planners. In 2011, the program matched 25 young planners with 14 mentors. The mentees and mentors participated in outings, meetings, coffee talks, planning events, periodic phone calls, and emails.

Following the successful completion of its introductory year, the Northern Section mentorship program is accepting new applications from mentors and mentees for a second year.

While students, young planners, and experienced planners in Northern California are constrained by busy schedules and geographic limitations, the feedback we received is that all parties learned a lot, and that we have generous, savvy planners in our area. One young planner, when asked what she felt was most helpful, said, "My mentor answered my questions patiently, and openly shared information about his experiences. He helped me prepare for interviews, and provided me with full access to his network. For someone first starting out in planning during a tough time, the support and wisdom that I gained from working with my mentor helped me navigate the job search process with more confidence."

When asked if there was anything she would suggest to mentees considering this program, she said, "Do it! The mentoring program is a partnership that will benefit you and your mentor in many ways. Make sure you're prepared to be an active participant in the process: prepare questions for your mentor, share your insights gained through recent

education or work experiences, and help the mentor stay on top of what's fresh in the field."

While the organizing committee tried as much as possible to match mentors to mentees based on areas of interest, we heard that in a few cases mentors and mentees did not "click," or that it was difficult for mentors or mentees to carve out time to visit different parts of the Bay Area. When surveyed, however, the vast majority of participants said the program met many or all of their expectations.

The organizing committee has made some changes for 2012 based on feedback from our first year participants. This year's application process will allow mentor and mentee applicants to prioritize either shared area of interest or geographic proximity. To foster sustaining relationships and allow for flexibility in scheduling, the session will be a yearlong program (the first year ran only from January through August). Events to bring mentors and mentees together will be planned throughout the year.

We hope to have more mentors in 2012 to offer 1:1 mentor relationships when possible. One of our mentors said, "I am really enjoying the opportunity to share my 35+ years of experience with a younger planner, and I'm encouraged that she seems to have the passion for creating positive change in the environment."

We hope you will join us for this adventure. Mentor and mentee applications, available on our website at <http://bit.ly/rRi1Sx> are due January 6, 2012. Details will be announced soon for a kick-off event early in February. ■

A bright lime green bicycle lane on Spring Street is aimed at reducing collisions and helping cyclists feel safer on their north-south commute through downtown Los Angeles.

<http://lat.ms/rZVM1p>