

Cities Seize Chances to Avoid CEQA Review through Voter Initiatives

BY JOSH STEPHENS

After 20 years, Los Angeles is on the verge of obtaining a new National Football League team. And as it turns out, the winning play for the NFL in Los Angeles may have been drawn up in a courtroom in Sacramento. In the cities of Carson and Inglewood, competing sponsors of stadium proposals are employing, simultaneously, a newly legitimized tactic to exempt their projects from review under the California Environmental Quality Act. Carson used the tactic to [approve its stadium last week in record time](#). It's a tactic that could revolutionize the use CEQA – not only for stadiums but for other big projects as well.

Last year, the California Supreme Court

decided *Tuolumne Jobs & Small Business Alliance v. Superior Court of Tuolumne County* in favor of Walmart, which had proposed a ballot initiative to approve a superstore in the City of Sonoma. Before the initiative went to voters, the city council adopted the language of the initiative, effectively approving the project and claiming the CEQA exception that would have been granted had voters actually approved the project.

It was a clever maneuver that combined two quirks of the California initiative process – the ability of a local government to simply adopt an initiative rather than place it on the ballot and the fact that the courts have ruled,

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The Man Who Changed The Way We Think About Parking

Back in 2010, when I was Mayor of Ventura, the city installed parking meters downtown for the first time in 40 years. Not for every parking space, of course. The meters covered only 300 or so prime spaces on Main Street and a few popular side streets. Thousands of other downtown spaces – both onstreet and off

– remained free.

The problem we were trying to solve was a pretty typical one: Demand was so high for the prime spaces that people were cruising up and down Main Street, causing a constant traffic jam, in search of a space. The spaces themselves were hogged by

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SCAG and OCTA Raises Concerns About AHSC Grant Process

Following the announcement of the finalists for \$120 million worth of grants through the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grant program, two regional planning agencies in southern California are calling foul. The five-county region covered by the Southern California Association of Governments, by far the largest metropolitan planning organization in the state, had only 12 of 54 finalists. By contrast, Alameda County alone had eight finalists. Darrell Johnson, CEO of the Orange County Transportation Authority, and SCAG President Carl Morehouse both wrote letters ([here](#) and [here](#), via CALCOG) to officials at the Strategic Growth Council decrying what they call a [selection process](#) that unfairly allocates AHSC funds. “It is unclear how the process for selection on the next step is reasonable or consistent with the legislative intent of the authorizing legislation,” wrote Morehouse. He called for SGC to accept full proposals from some of the applicants that had been rejected. Meanwhile, Johnson contended that the grant guidelines inappropriately excluded a streetcar project in Santa Ana that is one of OCTA’s high-priority projects. Assuming that the selection process goes forward as planned, SGC and its partner department, Housing and Community

Development, may revisit guidelines and consider geographic apportionment for the 2016 grant process.

San Diego County Rescinds Climate Plan

In a long-awaited move, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors officially rescinded the county’s Climate Action Plan, which had been the subject of a lawsuit from the Sierra Club since 2012 asserting that the plan violated the California Environmental Quality Act and didn’t do enough to combat global warming. On April 11, the California Supreme Court ruled against the county on the plan, denying its request to review and appeals court decision against the county and legally requiring the county to rescind the plan within 30 days. The 4th District Court of Appeals [had ruled](#) that the plan lacks the necessary specifics and enforcement mechanism to achieve the goals. “The Sierra Club wants to see a climate action plan that has meaningful and enforceable measures to achieve greenhouse gas reduction targets,” Davin Widgerow, a representative of the San Diego chapter of the Sierra Club, [told](#) the San Diego Union-Tribune.

L.A. Sustainability Plan Addresses Environment, Housing, Economy

Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles announced his new “[Sustainable City pLAN](#),” a far-reaching decree

that seeks to make Los Angeles sustainable in ways ranging from water to solar energy to waste. Among other things, the plan seeks to reduce daily Vehicle Miles Traveled by 5 percent by 2025; implement the Vision Zero policy to reduce traffic fatalities; have zero days in which air pollution reaches unhealthy levels by 2025; and complete 32 miles of Los Angeles River public access by 2025. The plan defines sustainability broadly to include not only ecological goals but also broad goals of social and economic sustainability. The plan also seeks to reduce driving and pollution, increase walkability within neighborhoods (using WalkScore), improve pedestrian safety, promote development of affordable housing and transit-oriented development, support the re:codeLA initiative to update the city’s zoning code, revitalize the L.A. River, and support environmental justice, among other goals. Garcetti also signed a mayoral directive that requires all city departments to incorporate pLAN goals into their programs, and establishes sustainability officers in applicable departments and bureaus. At a signing event, he pledged that this “is not a plan for the shelves.”

Marin County, Coastal Commission Agree to Time-Out

Marin County officials and state Coastal Commissioners agreed to take more time to hash out the nuances of new regulatory proposals that county

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William Fulton
Editor & Publisher

Susan Klipp
Circulation Manager

Martha Bridegam
Josh Stephens,

Talon Klipp
Graphics & Website

Morris Newman, Kenneth Jost
Contributing Editors

Solimar Research Group
Post Office Box 24618
Ventura, California 93002

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Visit our website:
WWW.CP-DR.COM

You may e-mail us at:
INFO@CP-DR.COM

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officials think could impose too many constraints on local farmers even as the Commission seeks to limit the impacts of agricultural activities in the coastal zone. Locals were worried that new regulations - detailed in hundreds of pages of complicated state analysis - would require farmers to get permits to switch agricultural uses, from ranching to grape-growing, for instance, and would tighten rules on building under the Coastal Act. At issue as well are requirements such as setbacks and the allowed ratio of buildings to acres of farmland that a farmer owns. Farmers expressed concerns that overly tight regulations could put them out of business. “Too many rules and regulations leads to outlaw behavior, so getting it right” is essential, Steve Kinsey, chairman of the Commission, told the [Marin Independent Journal](#). The delay in implementing regulations comes as the county withdrew its coastal development plan, giving the sides more time to reach an agreement. The county is expected to resubmit the plan in the fall.

Grand Jury Urges Dissolution of Financially Strapped City of Guadalupe

A Santa Barbara County grand jury recommended that the 7,080-population city of Guadalupe dissolve, which would make it the first city in the state to disincorporate since 1973. The report said that more than a decade of financial mismanagement, a declining tax base and increasing debt have doomed the town. City Administrator Andrew Carter said that the vote undersells attempts in the city for reform,

wherein city employees have taken a 5 percent pay cut, ground has been broken on a commercial development to add 800 homes, and voters overwhelmingly approved three tax initiatives to bring in over \$300,000 to the city budget. Carter added that the report’s recommendation conveyed undertones of a chasm between the working-class town - which is about 87 percent Latino - and the county. “The demographics of Guadalupe are the exact opposite of the demographics of Santa Barbara’s,” Carter [told](#) the Los Angeles Times.

National Planning Achievement Awards

The American Planning Association [announced](#) its 2015 National Planning Achievement Awards and National Planning Excellence Awards, recognizing the work of five California organizations among the nationwide recipients. The awards were handed out at this month’s APA National Conference in Seattle. Among the winners:

- The Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority has received the American Planning Association’s [National Planning Excellence Award for a Best Practice](#) for its First Last Mile Strategic Plan & Planning Guidelines. The guidelines to improve Los Angeles’s first and last mile transportation connectivity, providing a toolbox for localities to build support and resources for developing active transportation infrastructure like sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and clear signage directing users

to regional transit hubs.

- UCLA Professor of Planning and “parking guru” Donald Shoup has been named the recipient of the National Planning Excellence Award for a Planning Pioneer; see last week’s [CP&DR briefs](#) for a note about Shoup’s retirement. (See Insight in this issue.)
- Lake Tahoe Sustainability Action Plan, which provides a toolkit to local agencies in two states and five counties to rebalance the region’s environment and economy while confronting climate change.
- Pop-Up Outreach efforts in San Diego, which seek to connect neighborhoods that have historically low levels of trust in local government with urban planners through simple outreach efforts, including a chalkboard chat, street sign survey boxes, and pop-up feedback trees.
- Tongva Park & Ken Genser Square: a new urban park in Santa Monica that was once a parking lot. It covers 7.4 acres, features a lush landscape including rolling hills and gardens, overlooks the Santa Monica Pier, and is just two block away from the future terminus of a new light rail line.

New L.A. City Health Element Uses Planning to Reduce Health Disparities

Los Angeles officials have adopted new planning guidelines to reduce sharp health disparities across the city. A joint effort between the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, the city’s Planning Commission and

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the California Endowment, the new guidelines include such goals as ensuring 75 percent of all residents are within a quarter of a mile of a park, increasing the number of Angelenos who live within a mile of a farmers market, and improving access to grocery stores. With a city analysis showing that Brentwood resident live 12 years longer than Watts residents, and more than 30 percent of children in South L.A. and Boyle Heights are obese, the guidelines seek to establish targets not traditionally part of health policy. "The built environment has an enormous impact on health," Beatriz Solis, director of the California Endowment's Healthy Communities program for the Southern Region, told the [Los Angeles Times](#).

L.A. to Spend \$1.3 Billion to Fix Sidewalks

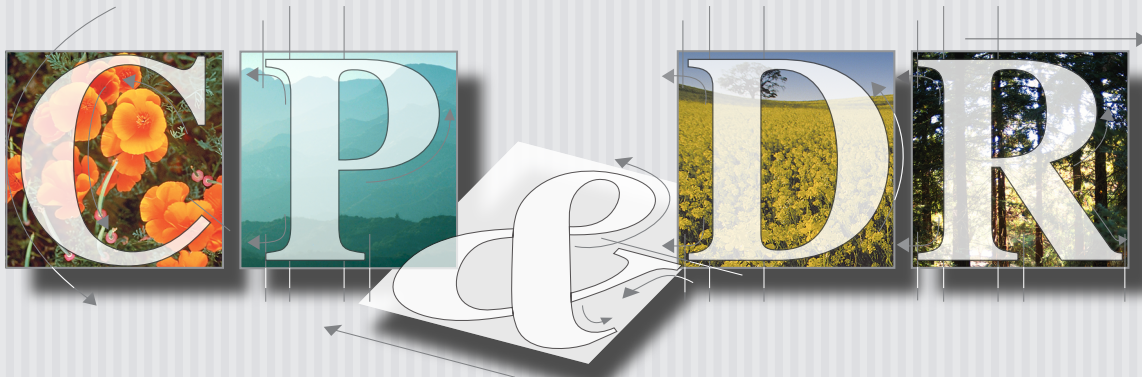
In a landmark agreement, Los Angeles is [pledging](#) to spend over \$1.3 billion

over the next three decades to fix its massive backlog of broken sidewalks and other infrastructure issues in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. In the agreement following a lawsuit filed by attorneys for the disabled, the city must spend \$31 million annually on sidewalk and other improvements beginning in the next budget year, then increasing to \$63 million in future years to adjust for rising costs. The city said that it plans to start by repairing sidewalks around parks, and in areas that are heavily trafficked, close to hospitals or workplaces, or that are requested by people with mobility challenges. It's unclear whether the promised money will completely eliminate the backlog, as about 40 percent of city sidewalks need repairs according to the Bureau of Street Services. The city has not identified any new funding sources for the settlement.

Change in Leadership at Dept. of Housing and Community Development

Claudia Cappio has left her role as director of the Department of Housing and Community Development to head the "Coliseum City" development plan in Oakland. Replacing her as acting director will be Susan Riggs, the former Executive Director of the San Diego Housing Federation. Riggs has been serving as Deputy Secretary of Housing Policy for the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency (BCSH) since January 2014. Prior to joining BCSH, Riggs served as the Executive Director of the San Diego Housing Federation. In this capacity, her primary goal was to promote the creation of safe, stable, and healthy housing that is affordable to lower income families and people in need. ■

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Pasadena Ushers In Era Of VMT Metrics

BY JOSH STEPHENS

Perhaps fittingly, one of the state's oldest, stateliest cities will be the first to institute one of the most sophisticated advances in planning tools since the slide rule. Not long ago, the City of Pasadena implemented metrics that measure projects' impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act in terms of vehicle miles traveled rather than level of service.

Pasadena is not only the first city in the state to adopt VMT metrics but may also be the first in the nation.

Pasadena's switch both responds to and precedes the adoption of Senate Bill 743. Passed in 2013 as an amendment to the California Environmental Quality Act, [SB 743](#) will require cities to evaluate traffic impacts according to vehicle miles traveled, not to traditional level-of-service thresholds.

Those thresholds take a narrow view of mobility, measuring only the flow of vehicular traffic. This switch means that impacts need not be mitigated only by improving vehicular flow but also by almost any other program or mode – including public transit, cycling, pedestrian improvements, and many other methods.

SB 743 complements 2008's Senate Bill 375, which encourages dense development and alternative transportation in the effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Many planners considered CEQA ironically hostile to SB 375's goals in part because of its reliance on VMT. Projects that increased congestion at poorly rated intersections were considered to have significant negative impacts.

The Office of Planning and Research recently released draft guidelines for VMT metrics, with a final draft expected later this year. Pasadena, however, is well ahead of most of its peers.

In 2004, Pasadena adopted a development plan that favors further density in the city's already built-up urban core. In 2008, the city began the process of updating the land use and mobility elements of its general plan. Building on the 2004 development plan, the general plan update all but necessitated the adoption of VMT metrics (allowed, but not necessarily encouraged, under CEQA at the time), so city planners drafted theirs from scratch, years before SB 743 was drafted.

The Pasadena City Council voted to adopt the metrics in November, and they were implemented at the beginning of this year. The metrics will soon be integrated into the entire general plan and its environmental impact report.

"They realized that...if we were going to transform our streets, we needed to measure whether a project is good or bad, figure out how to put the appropriate design into the project," said Pasadena Planning Director Vince Bertoni. "We had to measure traffic differently."

The LOS approach, born of 1950s-era management approaches, set up the paradoxical situation in which high-density development was often pushed away from city centers – where multiple transportation options are available – and out to urban fringes, where intersections are less congested even if they end up generating more and longer car trips.

"Over-reliance on level of service as the only indicator of success in our transportation systems is one of the biggest obstacles to infill development," said Jeffery Tumlin, principal and director of strategy at Nelson-Nygaard.

In many ways, Pasadena is the perfect city to usher in California's next chapter in smart growth. It is a metropolis in miniature, with a dense, mixed-use downtown, distinct thoroughfares, and stately suburban-style neighborhoods on its edges. The Old Pasadena commercial district instituted innovative parking reforms decades ago, and the city has embraced the Gold Line light rail.

"We're...essentially down to nothing but infill development," said Fred Dock, Pasadena's director of transportation.

VMT therefore complements the direction in which Pasadena was already headed, even with the inconveniences of LOS metrics.

"We don't widen the roads. We're managing congestion, we're managing traffic volumes, we're managing how signals operate," said Dock. "We're not able to add capacity in the sense that we would be able to mitigate a level-of-service impact."

Dock said that the inclusion of an impact fee will be crucial for the success of mitigation under the VMT metrics. Pasadena has used impact fees for amenities like

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parks for a decade. Dock said that impact fees can now be used for mitigation measures such as bike infrastructure and pedestrian plans and a host of other projects that can offset would-be VMT increases but would have been nearly meaningless under LOS metrics.

While embrace of VMT is a paradigm shift in the planning field, Pasadena may be an ideal proving ground, because the new metrics do not promise to have a significant impact on the city. They are expected to appear slowly, on a project-by-project basis.

“But what you’re going to see is...changes over time in terms of how people behave and move around,” Bertoni added. He said that buildings might get taller and a few surface parking lots might disappear.

No matter what guidelines OPR sends to the Natural Resources Agency in the coming months, Pasadena is almost bound to have an easier time adopting VMT metrics than many other California cities will.

“The learning curve in Pasadena isn’t going to be nearly as sharp as other places,” said Bertoni. “In other places, you’re going to have people who come to the table very leery of this and very cautious.”

Bertoni cited instances when community members, with no apparently connection to professional planning, arrived at meetings proactively asking the city to move off LOS and go to VMT. “And they know what it means!” he said.

Nonetheless, cities around the state are expected to take notice of Pasadena’s efforts. Bertoni said that he expects and welcomes inquires. “When you’re at the cutting edge like we are, that’s also part of your responsibility,” said Bertoni.

Other early adopters, including Oakland and San Francisco, are not expected to release their draft metrics for months.

“There’s a few cities that have been pioneering and gotten out in front of SB 743, which is helpful to us,” said Chris

Ganson, senior planner at the Governors Office of Planning and Research. “They’re developing these methods that can be examples for other cities.”

OPR is currently taking comments and working on the next draft of guidelines. Ganson said that the current draft has elicited “every flavor of response.”

However long it takes California’s other cities to become as comfortable with their VMT metrics as Pasadena is with its, Bertoni maintains that acceptance of VMT is

inevitable – not just in California, where it is mandated, but in places outside California too.

“This is where we are going not only as a city, as a region, as a country,” said Bertoni. ■

Contacts & Resources:

Vince Bertoni, Planning Director, City of Pasadena, (626) 744-7311

Fred Dock, Transportation Director, City of Pasadena, (626) 744-7311

Chris Ganson, Senior Planner, Office of Planning & Research, (916) 322-2318

Jeff Tumlin, Principal and Director of Strategy, Nelson/Nygaard, (415) 284-1544

Find OPR’s SB 743 Guidelines Discussion Draft [here](#).

“If we were going to transform our streets, we needed to measure whether a project is good or bad, figure out how to put the appropriate design into the project,” said Pasadena Planning Director Vince Bertoni. “We had to measure traffic differently.”

L.A. County General Plan: First Update in 35 Years

BY MARTHA BRIDEGAM

In the continuous scrum of Los Angeles County planning, some kind of milestone was reached this spring when the Board of Supervisors formally approved the county's 2035 General Plan update.

The new document is the first comprehensive rewrite of county planning rules since 1980. Among other things, it represents a new focus on the county's urbanized unincorporated areas, as well as more traditional undeveloped areas on the fringe. It is the first L.A. County general plan to take advantage of digital mapping approaches in promoting more consistent groupings of land use policies across multiple properties and types of ownership. It's an approach that meshes well with current state and federal planning processes for alternative energy -- which matters especially because of pressures for solar and wind energy development in the Antelope Valley.

The plan as [approved March 24](#) promotes "smart growth" and energy efficiency, encouraging mixed-use and transit-oriented development with measures that include 11 "Transit Oriented Districts" in half-mile areas around major transit stops with special design standards and development incentives. The plan promotes air quality and climate protections, in part through a Community Climate Action Plan working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. The plan looks toward an expansion of Significant Ecological Areas for habitat preservation, updates a Hillside Management Areas ordinance for slopes, creates zones to focus business and industrial growth. A renewable energy ordinance is still in the works to clarify rules for utility-scale wind and solar projects. The county has given effect to these new policies by rezoning more than 4000 parcels for consistency.

The plan primarily affects unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County that house about 1 million of the county's 10 million people. Most of the square mileage is in mountain, desert and military areas in northward parts of the county. But most of the population lives in urban unincorporated areas located near the City of Los Angeles, which is where the TOD areas are located.

The volatile land use pressures in such areas can be inferred easily enough from the [map of unincorporated areas](#). The city of Santa Clarita stands out as an island just north of the main incorporated cities. The Lancaster/

Palmdale area is another island of incorporated territory farther out, flanked by the two protected expanses of Angeles National Forest and wrapped around the off-limits acreage of Edwards Air Force Base. The edges of these outlying incorporated areas are subject to pressure for real estate expansion, though their dryness adds irony to the term "greenfield development". The desert areas that remain in private hands offer attractive sunny and windy conditions for alternative energy installations.

It isn't easy to balance interests in such a place. Irreconcilable tensions persist between developers and environmental advocates and between supporters and opponents of residential density. But Los Angeles County sees less tension than in some neighboring counties between state renewable-energy imperatives and counties' assertion of control over private land.

The easiest DRECP county

Los Angeles County has achieved a far easier relationship than other counties with the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), an effort by state and federal agencies to streamline their renewable energy permitting processes across California's southeastern desert areas.

Among the seven counties in the DRECP planning area, the five inland counties -- Inyo, San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial and Kern -- have objected to the plan's emphasis on using private rather than public land to site large energy facilities. Since large areas of those counties are under federal or other public ownership, local governments have reasserted their claims to taxation and regulatory authority over the privately owned areas where they have some control. San Diego County has less land affected than the others. That leaves Los Angeles County.

Among the seven, only Los Angeles County is in a position to coordinate gracefully with the DRECP process for substantial amounts of expected development. The reason is that L.A. County's unincorporated areas include plenty of taxpaying private property.

Paul McCarthy, who was Regional Planning's Section Head, Impact Analysis until his retirement in March, represented Los Angeles County Regional Planning in work on the DRECP draft. He said other counties would not want to see additional private lands removed from

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tax rolls for mitigation or other purposes. Whereas in Los Angeles County, if any land is dedicated to open space (as a mitigation parcel might be), “Oh, everyone’s happy.”

“Not even half facetiously, I said, look, if you want to make all the mitigation areas come to L.A. County, you can do that.” (More seriously, that can’t precisely be done because lost habitat has to be replaced with comparable land -- and not all desert habitats can be found in Los Angeles County, despite climates varying by 10,000 feet of elevation across an area the size of Connecticut.)

As [discussed previously in CP&DR](#), the county’s Significant Ecological Areas (SEA), Renewable Energy Ordinance and [Antelope Valley Area Plan update](#) all interact with the DRECP plan, and thus far seem to be harmonizing with it.

The SEA approach is analogous to the DRECP in that both plans use conservation overlays to promote connectivity in habitat preservation across multiple types of land ownership.

Susan Tae, the Supervising Regional Planner for Community Studies North, said the SEAs are managed “for cumulative biological value” as a county resource. Los Angeles County’s 1980 General Plan had some SEA designations but they were extremely limited. The newer SEA boundaries are larger but allow limited development more flexibly within them, with far greater emphasis on preserving habitat connectivity from one parcel to the next -- whether or not the zoning or ownership varies.

SEA designations are uniquely flexible in that, instead of banning development outright on sensitive private land, they take a harm-reduction type of approach, keeping important vegetation on parts of the property and preserving ways for wildlife to pass through without blocking the economic benefits of ownership outright.

“Everybody understood from the get-go that there was this basic difference” with respect to L.A. County, McCarthy said -- that “we had done a lot of work with the SEAs before we came on board with the DRECP.” That meant work such as mapping by biologists had already been done under the long-established SEA program and “we were accustomed to operating with it.”

McCarthy said comparable programs had not formed in other DRECP counties. Like Los Angeles County, the inland counties of Imperial, Inyo, Riverside and San Bernardino received California Energy Commission grants to update their general plans for renewable energy production, but McCarthy said that despite “some conversation back and forth” he was “not aware of any conscious effort by another county to imitate us.” Which made sense given the differing pressures, eh said.

The timing, however, has been tricky. The four-agency DRECP drafting team had already circulated its draft environmental review document before the SEA boundaries were final. Comment on the DRECP draft closed in February 2015. Accordingly the draft DRECP document, read literally, implied that the state and federal agencies might support utility-scale wind and solar facilities across much of the Antelope Valley in northern Los Angeles County.

McCarthy said, “We knew that one of us would get to the finish line first but we didn’t know which one would in terms of the DRECP getting out there or us getting our plans adopted.”

He said it was at his request that the DRECP draft incorporated the 1980 General Plan’s much smaller SEA boundaries into the proposal, in order to avoid “jumping the gun” with new boundaries that might still be changed. “Everybody agreed that when the time came, as soon as they got the update they would change the maps within their documents.”

According to Tae and McCarthy, the understanding was that the final DRECP version would avoid the final boundaries of Los Angeles County’s SEAs and also its Economic Opportunity Areas. As far as the DRECP agencies were concerned on this arrangement, McCarthy said, “They’re very happy. There’s no problem with them.”

A work in progress

The new General Plan update builds on important prior approvals and looks toward more that are expected this spring.

The SEA boundaries were chosen partly through a countywide process, but they were negotiated as parts

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of regional plans for two areas where there is strong pressure for development: the Antelope Valley Area Plan, which won preliminary support from the Supervisors last November, and the Santa Clarita Valley’s “One Valley One Vision” [area plan](#), passed in 2012, which includes the area of the massive [Newhall Ranch](#) development plan.

Further approvals supporting the General Plan’s completion are the county [housing element update](#) and the [Santa Monica Mountains Local Coastal Plan](#), both approved last year.

Tae said the new expanded countywide SEA boundaries were [approved December 10](#) by the Regional Planning Commission, then received the Supervisors’ initial approval as part of their main General Plan vote in March. The SEA boundaries and the Antelope Valley Area Plan were both awaiting final adoption by the Supervisors. Tae said the implementing SEA Ordinance was off calendar.

The county’s Renewable Energy Ordinance, which is designed to work with the DRECP, remains in a regulatory approval process. A [draft EIR](#) was posted for comment on February 20. The Regional Planning Commission [recommended approval](#) of the proposed ordinance as of April 22. It next goes to the Board of Supervisors.

Tae took care to specify that by proposing detailed regulations for utility-scale wind and solar projects in the proposed ordinance, “the County is not trying to make it easier for those projects.” Instead she wrote that the intention was to clarify the requirements to all parties, and she noted each proposed development site is subject to conditional use permit and California Environmental Quality Act review.

‘The blink of an eye’

McCarthy, who retired at the end of March, was interviewed for this story on his last day of work after 47 years of county service, 44 of them with the Department

“When I came in originally,” he said, “most employees were World War II vets and they didn’t type. The guys, they didn’t type. So we had secretaries who did the typing.”

of Regional Planning. Looking back, he spoke with a touch of wonderment about the change wrought in the department by computerization -- a change that’s highly visible in the current General Plan update’s new approaches.

Originally, McCarthy said, the department had 250 or 275 employees, he said, but the department had come down to 175 or so and it was “producing more” because of computerization, with staff often heading out to community meetings, which they

did not use to do.

“When I came in originally,” he said, “most employees were World War II vets and they didn’t type. The guys, they didn’t type. So we had secretaries who did the typing. Today the planner does his own typing, his own proofreading. It’s much more efficient.” Clerical -- a department then -- would type a document. It would return to the planner for proofing. He would send it back with corrections. And so on.

Comparatively, he said, productivity had increased hugely. Particularly the time it takes to get data onto a map -- “It’s just the blink of an eye.”

He’d begun work before the 1970 passage of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). At first, he said CEQA environmental impact reports took up six or eight or ten pages. “One of the reasons for that was the limitations of a mimeograph machine,” he said. And then -- “All of a sudden someone invented the copy machine and that’s when the reports started getting much bigger.” Planners started doing their own editing and copying, he said, and the documents ballooned.

On the other hand, McCarthy remembered highly effective and accurate population research reports written long ago by demographer George Morrow, now deceased. In the absence of Internet posting, he said Morrow worked on the phone to the Census Bureau in Washington, forming such warm relationships with Census staff that after retiring

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he made a social visit to see them in D.C.

Better mapping, new problems

Better mapping may allow for more nuanced planning, but it also stirs up sleeping issues. Hearings on the General Plan components have been punctuated by public-comment appearances of property owners worried about status changes for individual parcels.

At a Regional Planning Commission hearing last October 8, an example came up of a deferred zoning issue made visible by better mapping. It's presumably not the only one of its kind.

At issue was whether a decision in the 1970s to rezone a North Pasadena property as "open space" was a technological glitch to be undone or an informed policy decision worth keeping. A neighbor, Greg Lasel, liked the "open space" designation as is. He told the Commission the property was mostly a "drainage ravine," so construction there would create drainage and slope stability issues.

Tina Fung, a Senior Regional Planning Assistant working on housing aspects of the General Plan, testified in response that the parcel appeared to have been zoned Open Space for consistency reasons in a temporary urgency ordinance

related to the 1980 General Plan. In the new General Plan process, Regional Planning staff proposed an R-1/20,000 zoning designation.

Fung added a comment that pointed to the importance of technological change: "Back in 1970's, because of the lack of technology... our zoning map was pretty much a bubble map, so it wasn't really parcel-based. Now that we have the technology to look at parcel-by-parcel level, then we realize that this is privately owned and there's no dedicated open space there." She displayed an aerial map of nearby parcels, changing the map's scale as she spoke, to support her argument that the sloped parcel was surrounded by residential zoning designations of R-1/20,000 and was not dedicated open space, hence should be rezoned to match its neighbors.

The property, with its alleged ravine, presumably looked much as it did in the 1970s. And the conversation at the hearing didn't resolve Lasel's question. But the system surrounding the question had changed. The data for resolving the problem no longer had to be dug out of paper copies of maps stored at headquarters. The response to it no longer had to be typed out by hand. And sent to the planner for correction. And sent to Clerical again for retyping. By hand. ■



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Formed with the passage of SB 732 in 2007, the *Strategic Growth Council*, a cross-sector panel consisting of department heads and secretaries across state government (plus full-time staff), acts as a coordinating organization to consider the development of California's built environment and protection of the state's environment. Most recently, the SGC has focused on awarding roughly \$200 million in planning grants through the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program.

Two public seats were recently been added to the 10-member council. Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins selected Gail Goldberg, formerly planning director for both San Diego and Los Angeles. In January, Senate Pro Tem Kevin DeLeon named USC Professor of Sociology *Manuel*

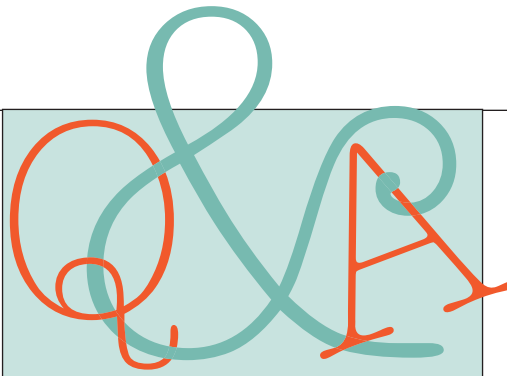
Pastor as his inaugural public appointee. Pastor, who is the Director of the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and longtime advocate for equity and social justice in land use, has served on a variety of public boards and commissions and has produced scholarship with direct policy implications. Pastor recently spoke with CP&DR's Josh Stephens about his goals for his tenure on the SGC.

What role have you played so far, and what role will you play generally as a public member?

I came right when a lot of decisions were being made. I think it's a very important decision-making body made more important by the fact that it's played a role in the allocation of cap-and-trade revenues. We are dealing with an extraordinarily important set of issues: How do we reconfigure our urban landscapes in a way that are more sustainable in terms of growth and in terms of climate change?

Probably each of us sees our roles in a different way. I've spent a lot of time working on environmental justice issues. We helped develop the precursor to [CalEnviroScreen](#). [CP&DRs coverage of CalEnviroScreen can be found [here](#).] I see my role as a public member as making sure that some of the issues of social equity are addressed.

I think the fact that I've been well versed in environmental justice and climate change was probably in Kevin DeLeon's mind when he appointed me. I also think it's my role to make



MANUEL PASTOR



PUBLIC MEMBER,
CALIFORNIA STRATEGIC
GROWTH COUNCIL

sure that the concerns of a large city like Los Angeles are addressed as well.

What is your initial impression of the AHSC grant process?

I think there was a very extensive and successful outreach effort to encourage people to apply. I do think in the evolution of the guidelines it would have been nice if there had been more time between the initial unveiling of the guidelines and the approval of those guidelines by the Strategic Growth Council. There was, of course, an urgency this year to make sure that the money got out.

(The guidelines might consider) whether or not affordable housing should get more weight in terms of greenhouse gas reductions, because we know that lower income households use public transit more. I also wonder

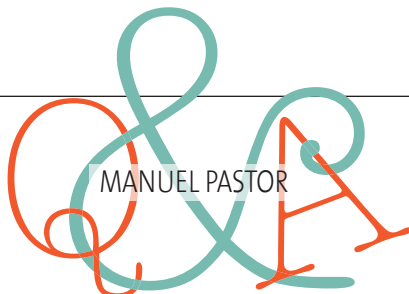
whether the caps per jurisdiction make sense when you have jurisdictions of such different sizes in California. I do think you need to have a lot of geographic diversity (in the grant allocation). Whether jurisdictional caps are the way to do it, I think that's something that will be considered further along.

Are there specific projects or specific changes to that program that you feel fit your personal missions?

The council has numerous voices and numerous concerns, both from the members and from public participation. Some people are going to raise greenhouse gas emissions as a primary concern. Some are going to focus on transit. The housing advocates are obviously quite focused on housing in part because the redevelopment dollars have disappeared. I think my particular role is to bring up the issues of equity; I'm really glad other people do other things. That's what makes for a full and complete package.

Some representatives from SCAG have expressed concerns that the SCAG region did not have enough concept proposals accepted? What's your reaction to those concerns?

I've heard those concerns, but I haven't had a chance to look at them in as much detail. SCAG is a large area; large parts of it are very ready to move on these issues. A significant share of the tracts targeted under CalEnviroScreen are in the Southern California area. We're (in Los Angeles) making a



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\$40 billion commitment of our own money to (transit). So, whatever the reasons were that led to SCAG not being as successful in this round, I hope that those reasons are addressed, both by SCAG and the Council.

Are there other things SGC can do to promote the kind of housing that you would like to see?

I would like us to be doing two things better than what we're currently doing: firstly, providing even more weight for very-low-income housing; and, secondly, providing even more weight to those tracts that have fallen to the very tail end of the distribution in terms of CalEnviroScreen.

One of the things that research has been increasingly showing is that sometimes when you do transit-oriented development, the people who move in may use public transit but not as much on a daily basis if they are higher-income residents who are used to their autos. You're not going to get so much GHG reduction bang for your buck if you don't include a significant share of affordable housing for the kinds of residents who rely on public transit for their everyday needs.

What are you working on academically right now? How does serving in this public position relate to your academic work?

It relates pretty closely. We put out a report called [An Agenda for Equity](#) looking at how strategies for concerns about equity fit into the transit roll-out of Southern California. We've also been trying to take a look at the implementation of the cap-and-trade system. There were some concerns from the environmental justice community that it would not wind up really cleaning up localized pollution and places where businesses would essentially choose to use the trade system rather than to clean up their own pollution.

We also have just finished a book from UC Press called *Equity, Growth, and Community*. We're trying to look at those places in the United States that do a better job of wedding the concerns of economic prosperity and social inclusion through creating public processes that involve different constituencies. Sometimes these processes run by public agencies, such as the Blueprint process in SACOG (Sacramento Area Council of Governments), sometimes run by public-private partnerships like Envision Utah.

We're trying to look at whether or not they're bringing people into conversation with one another and whether it's having an impact on equity and growth outcomes. We're finding that it does. That brings up a lot of really interesting ways for creating more opportunities for conversation and

collaboration as part of the planning process.

How exciting is it for you personally to have this public outlet for your academic work?

I've always viewed myself as doing work that's relevant to public policy concerns and helping community groups and others come up with solutions that they can market to policy leaders. I've participated on other committees and commissions before, such as the [Regional Targets Advisory Committee](#), helping the COGs set their greenhouse gas and vehicle miles traveled reductions. This is a more significant role because in most of those other roles you're recommending policy, in this one, we're moving money. That's big, and it's also a significant source of money.

Potentially \$600 million per year within two years?

It's possible. I think the number that is more realistic is \$500 million. It just depends on how the cap and trade system evolves. My sense is that it's outperforming in terms of revenue generation compared to what people expected.

What's your take on the mood in California today?

I just think it's an exciting time to be part of the planning community in California. Today I was at the press release for the Mayor of LA releasing his sustainability plan for Los Angeles. Extraordinarily ambitious goals with interwoven objectives of economic growth, social equity, and environmental improvement. The Bay Area is concerned with these issues as well through ABAG. For all the people who 20 years ago were saying that we should do smart growth, that moment has kind of come.

The big issue, now that we've become successful with more compact development and infill development, is: Can we do it in a way that doesn't result in displacement? Gentrification is a clumsy term because parts of it are good and parts of it are bad. I think that that's the big challenge now. It's an exciting moment for planning.

Are you optimistic?

I'm optimistic about the spirit of the planners and the spirit of the community organizations to get their voice in the planning process. The economy is running a lot faster and harder than the rest of us.

If you think about San Francisco: That's almost like putting your finger in the dike; it moves along so rapidly. I'm optimistic about L.A. I think we're getting a little bit ahead of the process here. ■

>>> Cities Seize Chances to Avoid CEQA Review through Voter Initiatives

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particularly in 2001’s *Friends of Sierra Madre v. City of Sierra Madre*, that initiatives are not subject to CEQA review because the constitution trumps statute. The court ruled that the California Elections Code allowed for this maneuver.

The *Tuolumne* decision means that, essentially, CEQA review can be avoided not only by popular vote but also by council action – if the council is adopting an initiative that has qualified for the ballot. Members of California’s environmental community have feared that the ruling opens up a huge hole in the state’s defensive line against environmentally insensitive development.

“I think the decision, if you just look at the legal background and what the election code says, was correctly decided,” said David Pettit, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council. “I think it’s a bad decision in terms of public policy, because you’re cutting out... two most important values of CEQA.” Pettit described those values as public participation and the ability of opponents of a project to file lawsuits if they believe an EIR is faulty.

The *Tuolumne* precedent applies to any potential project that falls under CEQA jurisdiction. But the coincidence of two high-profile projects both employing the tactic of council approval of proposed ballot measures suggests that developers and public officials are eager to use the new tool to speed up some projects.

In Inglewood, more than 22,000 residents signed a petition to place the proposed stadium and entertainment center on the ballot. Proposed by a partnership between Stan Kroenke, the owner of the St. Louis Rams, and Stockbridge Capital, the major partner in the mixed-use redevelopment of the [Hollywood Park race track site](#), the 80,000-seat stadium would presumably house a relocated Rams team.

Shortly after the group submitted its signatures in late January, the Inglewood City Council indicated that it would dispense with the actual vote and proceed with direct approval of the language of the ballot initiative. City officials considered the actual vote to be superfluous. Opponents of the stadium project circulated a petition to place on the ballot a referendum that would un-do council approval, but that effort appears to be waning.

“We had more people sign the initiative than had ever voted in an election in Inglewood, so we were certain that it was going to pass,” said Inglewood Mayor James Butts. “We would have spent \$200,000 on an election for something we knew would pass.”

Butts added that the Hollywood Park redevelopment has been planned since 2006. It is only now getting underway, having spent three years going through the CEQA process and weathering the 2008 recession.

A similar pattern is playing out in Carson, where a partnership between the Oakland Raiders and the San Diego Chargers has proposed a stadium that would house both teams. Backers submitted 14,000 signatures – almost double the required number – March 21. The City Council approved the project one month later.

With both stadiums headed for approval the question is whether they will inspire an onslaught of similar attempts or whether they amount to two high-profile anomalies. It may turn out that the *Tuolumne* tactic makes sense only under specific conditions.

“I can certainly see the appeal of this tactic, if you’ve got a smaller city and you feel that people just want the jobs more than anything else,” said Pettit. “In a place like L.A. or San Francisco, I think it’s very less likely to work.”

Large cities pose a challenge because of political rivalries and the challenges of amassing the tens of thousands of

Butts said that one of the benefits of using the Tuolumne provision is that it makes the project much less susceptible to lawsuits, including, he said, lawsuits that could be filed by the competition in Carson.

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>>> Cities Seize Chances to Avoid CEQA Review through Voter Initiatives

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signatures that may be required to put a question on the ballot. Conversely, projects that are not on the billion-dollar order of a football stadium may have relatively little trouble with the conventional CEQA process in the first place.

As well, competition between Inglewood and Carson may have prompted them to use the *Tuolumne* tactic to fast-track approvals, since it is likely that the NFL will approve a team (or teams) for only one of the two projects.

“When you have a situation like this where there are competitors that want to do what you’re doing, to unnecessarily slow yourself down, it’s suicidal economically for your community,” said Butts.

Butts said that one of the benefits of using the *Tuolumne* provision is that it makes the project much less susceptible to lawsuits, including, he said, lawsuits that could be filed by the competition in Carson.

“What I don’t like about CEQA...you open yourself up to people outside your community suing you,” said Butts. “I am certain that would occur.”

Supporters of the tactic insist that council approval of a would-be vote is not lacking in safeguards. And supporters have to ensure that the project that is circulated for the vote and approved by the council is essentially shovel-ready. By contrast, the EIR process gives developers the chance to introduce mitigation measures along the way.

Carson City Attorney Sunny Soltani insisted that, were the City Council to approve the language of the ballot initiative (which has not yet come before the council), it would be anything but a rubber stamp. She said that the Council reserves the right to conduct its own environmental analysis of the proposal and to reject it if it causes what they consider undue impacts.

“The council can require staff to hire consultants to look at the initiative’s mitigation measures to see if they are giving due consideration to the issues that they would be concerned about,” said Soltani.

Butts said that the Inglewood stadium proposal amounts to a modification of the existing Hollywood Park redevelopment plan, which had a full EIR. He emphasized that it will not generate significantly more traffic than the

racetrack did or than the nearby Forum does.

He said that the city would not be approving the project were it not for those existing conditions and the rigor of the review that has already been conducted.

“It wasn’t like we were going to put a nuclear power plant or even a gas station,” said Butts. “It was a substitute entertainment venue.”

Nonetheless, cities and developers are likely to explore the precedent that *Tuolumne* has set. Pettit said that he would “definitely” advise clients to pursue this tactic if he was representing developers and not environmental interests.

“I think the development community is watching these two stadiums with huge interest,” said Pettit. “If it does work, I think you’re going to see...a fair amount of development projects using this instead of going through CEQA.”

It remains to be seen whether the Legislature agrees with Pettit and other environmentalists who say that the ruling violates the spirit of CEQA.

“I do believe it is outside the intent of CEQA, which is to not let public agencies escape their responsibilities by passing them off to the voters,” said attorney Antonio Rossmann. “The interesting thing to watch for will be this year to see if, after going back and forth on CEQA, there is a consensus that builds around some CEQA amendments. And if changes to CEQA prove too controversial, as they often have, there may be opportunities to amend the Elections Code instead.” ■

Contacts:

James Butts, Mayor, City of Inglewood, (310) 412-5111

David Pettit, senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, 310-434-2300

Antonio Rossmann, partner at Rossmann and Moore, LLP, (415) 861-1401

Sunny Soltani, City Attorney, City of Carson, (949) 250-5407

>>> The Man Who Changed The Way We Think About Parking

– CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

merchants and their employees. It was hard to enforce the existing two-hour time limit, and the parkers gamed the system with such familiar tricks as wiping the meter maids' chalk of their tires. Meanwhile, a half-block away, parking lots and a parking garage sat empty.

The initial political blowback from our paid parking system was, to put it mildly, overwhelming. Merchants complained that there was no place for their customers to park. Longtime customers said they would never come downtown again. Even the Tea Party got worked up. They said it was double taxation because the parking spaces had already been paid for with tax money, and they got the notorious Los Angeles radio talk show hosts John & Ken to rail about me for an entire afternoon. (For the record, John and Ken called me a “dumbass”.)

Despite all the blowback, however, one thing was clear: [The paid parking system worked](#). The merchants and employees stopped parking in the prime spaces on Main Street and parked in the off-street lots and garage instead, but there were still plenty of free spots for customers as well. The traffic jam on Main Street vanished. Spots were available on every block, all the time, for drivers willing to lay out a dollar an hour. Some business reimbursed their customers for the parking, and retail sales actually went up. Just about the only people who vanished from downtown

were window-shoppers who never bought anything. Over time everybody got used to the new system and decided it was a good thing.

None of this would have happened were it not for the inspiring vision of one man: Don Shoup.

Since the publication of his book, [The High Cost of Free Parking](#), a decade ago, Don Shoup has accomplished something every academic hopes to achieve and almost no one ever does: He has completely reframed an important public policy issue so that everybody thinks about it differently.

Even policy wonks used to think of a good parking space as a birthright – a free public good that everybody was entitled to. Now, policy wonks – and, increasingly, everyday folks – understand that parking is an expensive commodity to provide in America's increasingly crowded and expensive urban neighborhoods. As with any other commodity, if parking is too plentiful and too cheap, we'll use it inefficiently – and we won't be able to make profitable use of urban land as a result. That's bad for business and it's bad for the quality of urban neighborhoods. Even in my new job running a think tank in Houston, not a day goes by where I don't invoke Don Shoup's name.

The idea that Don Shoup has emerged as one of the most

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>>> The Man Who Changed The Way We Think About Parking

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influential urban thinkers in America is nothing short of extraordinary. For almost half a century, he has been a quirky, bearded, bicycling professor of urban planning at UCLA – often regarded as interesting but not always viewed as a heavyweight. When I went to UCLA planning school in the early ‘80s, he was largely dismissed by his colleagues in the program. Instead of talking about large planning concepts, he talked about how people cruised for parking spaces in Westwood. Instead of publishing in academic journals, he published op-ed pieces in the Los Angeles Times. Instead of testing us on big-picture concepts, he administered quirky quizzes.

One of his quiz questions was: “Who said, ‘The difference between a little money and an enormous amount of money is very slight, but the difference between a little money and no money at all is enormous?’” The answer, of course, was not Milton Friedman or Paul Krugman but Dolly Levi. I was the only student in the class who got the question right – only because I had just gone to see a revival of Hello Dolly! the weekend before. But embedded in the question is a good lesson about life in an age of income inequality.

Even though I got that question right, I often struggled in

Don’s class. In fact, my struggles later formed the basis for one of Don’s favorite stories -- about a young writer trying to understand how to write like an economist. I won’t repeat the story here, but you can watch [Don tell it here about MINUTE](#). The story tells a lot – not so much about me but about how much Don loves a good yarn.

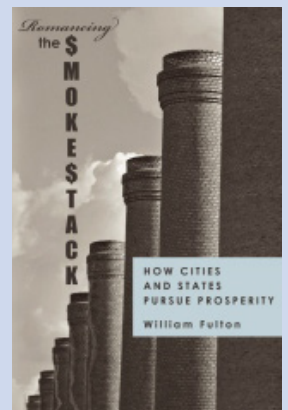
Which, of course, is one of the reasons why he has been so successful in the last decade. Above all else, Don Shoup is engaging. He tells his stories in a low-key, funny way. And by being so matter-of-fact, he makes his take on parking seem logical – and therefore the traditional view of parking as a free commodity seem like utter nonsense.

The next time you walk down the street in a vibrant urban neighborhood, thank Don Shoup. He’s the reason there’s always a place to park – for a price – and the reason parking hasn’t consumed the entire neighborhood.

Don Shoup is retiring from UCLA and the Shoup Fellowship Fund has been established in his honor. If you donate to the fund by May 30th, Don and Pat Shoup will match your contribution 3:1. (I already donated \$1,000.) Just go to www.Shoupista.com to make your contribution! ■

Romancing the \$moke \$tack How Cities And States Pursue Prosperity

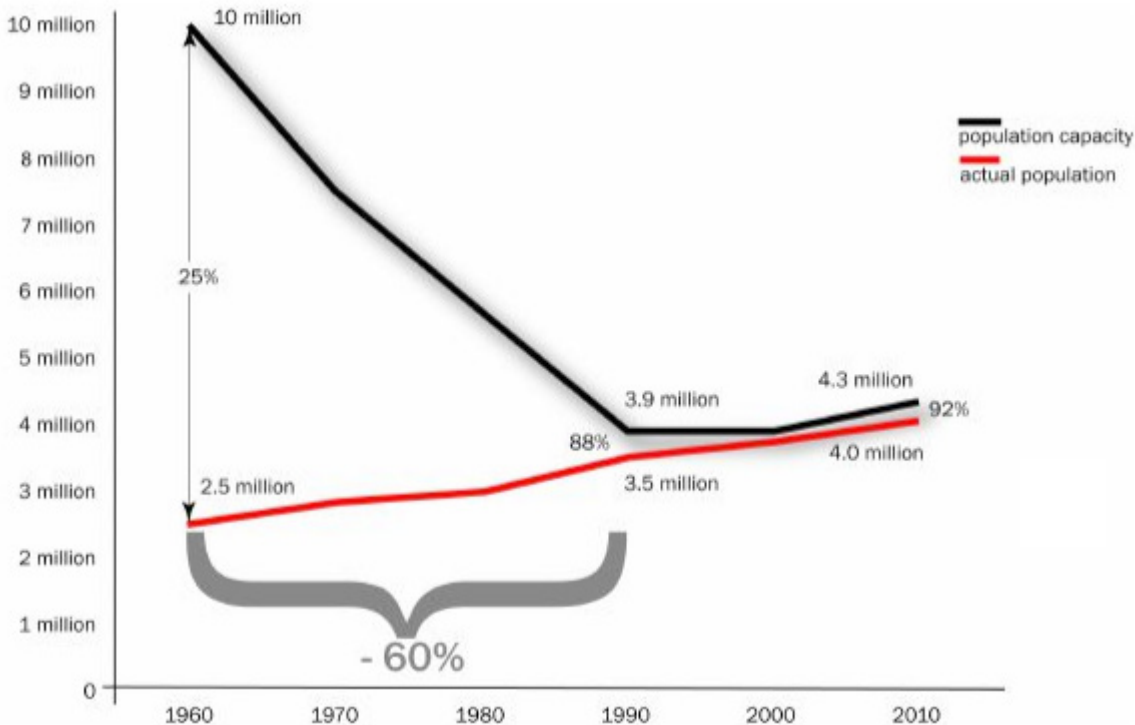
Bill Fulton’s Book On Economic Development



Los Angeles's Slow-Growthers Have Gotten What They Wanted

Los Angeles' housing crisis has been building for long enough that just about anyone who rents an apartment here could have told you about it years ago. But it wasn't until last summer that UCLA released a report confirming what many of us already know: as a function of average rents (high) and average incomes (low, especially compared to those in San Francisco and New York) Los Angeles is the least-affordable rental market in the country.

Circulating around the blogosphere now is a single graph that illustrates why:



This graph comes from a dissertation by UCLA Ph.D. student Greg Morrow, posted on the [blog](#) of Prof. Richard Green, of USC. Green showed it to me on Friday at the Urban Land Institute's [Urban Marketplace](#) conference. I'd like to say that we had a lively discussion (which we did, on other topics) so much as we shared a moment of mutual speechless bewilderment. The graph mostly speaks for itself: Los Angeles' population is, after 100 or so years of development, just about equal with the city's maximum allowable population.

As Henry Grabar puts it in [Salon](#), Los Angeles has "reached capacity."

What this means for housing costs is obvious: the difference between those two lines is affordability. It's also opportunity for developers. Constrained supply and ever increasing demand equals [insane housing prices](#). In a typical industry, supply would never become this constrained. Firms would produce more, or consumers would seek substitutes. Equilibrium would be restored.

But this is real estate, and those rules don't apply.

Usually "constrained" is used as a passive verb, as if it's something that just happens. But the "hand" here is very much visible. When we think of "capacity," Los Angeles didn't lose 60 percent of its landmass en route from 10 million to 4 million, and it didn't lose 60 percent of its water, power, food, or sewage capacity either (though the first one remains to be seen).

Those 6 million men, women, and children were zoned,

voted, and legislated off the island.

That downward slope tells a fascinating tale for anyone who's not currently struggling to make rent. The greatest irony is that Los Angeles' peak population of 10 million was allowed a time when its population was a fraction of what it was today. Either the city's public officials were thinking big prior to 1960, or they figured that even a number like 4 million was unthinkable, so what difference did a few more million make?

Los Angeles's Slow-Growthers Have Gotten What They Wanted

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What happened, though, was a revolt by homeowners. The 1960s were heady times for the conversion of single-family homes into multifamily dingbat apartments, leading residents to fret about the loss of “neighborhood character.” This usually equates with a fear of poor people and/or minorities. They were, at the same time, horrible times for public transit, as the trolley system clanged its last bell. The freeways ran smoothly for a while, but then they filled up, leading to more fears about growth.

Los Angeles has always been, a “reluctant metropolis,” to borrow *CP&DR* publisher Bill Fulton’s phrase, and the dream of the single-family home has held sway. Worries about the “Manhattanization” have persisted for years, never mind that even at 10 million people, Los Angeles would be about as dense as New York City as a whole, but still nowhere near as dense as Manhattan.

So, homeowners pushed through anti-growth legislation, advocated by residents who wanted to keep Los Angeles all to themselves. As Grabar catalogs in his Salon piece, small measures to keep Manhattan out of California included silly, unjustifiable requirements like setbacks, which do nothing but waste land, and parking requirements, which also waste land and jack up developers’ costs.

On the more monumental scale, these sentiments culminated in 1986’s Prop U.

Prop U, which is where that top graph bottoms out, was the mother of all slow-growth measures, down-zoning much of the city’s commercial areas. (According to its framers, Prop U itself was crafted not to directly impact housing supply.) It passed by a 2:1 ratio. What you can bet is that the actual sentiments among Los Angeles residents were probably flipped. Except, just owners of single-family

homes control 80 percent of L.A.’s residential land while representing a far smaller proportion of the population, so do they dominate elections. A 2013 poll by the Pat Brown institute found that “older voters and homeowners are disproportionately represented in mayoral voting.”

Half-measures and creeping protectionism that had satisfied anti-growth activists during the 1960s and 1970s were no longer enough once they saw the city hitting 3.5 million. (Not coincidentally, the city’s public transit system was in a world of hurt at the time, thus favoring lower densities and people who could afford cars and places to park them.) The implications of movements like Prop U were largely invisible for a while — you can’t see what you can’t build — until they started showing up in astronomical rents.

Today, many of Los Angeles’ planners are trying to wring as much density out of the city as they possibly can. Developers are too, but, contrary to the stereotype of the marauding capitalist, they know as well as anyone that they build only at the pleasure of city policy and the public officials who can grant variances to it.

Los Angeles’ planners are also working on ReCode:LA, a comprehensive, and much-needed, overhaul of the city’s zoning code. You can bet that they’re going to go for more density, especially around the city’s new transit nodes. If the effort fails, though, that red line on the graph might one day overtake the black line. People are going to keep coming to L.A. whether the slow-growthers of 1986 like it or not. And we’ll really have a crisis on our hands.

– JOSH STEPHENS | APR 6, 2015 ■

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Failure and Success in Michael Graves' Architecture

With their startling colors, jarring juxtaposition of architectural styles and emphasis on simple geometry, Michael Graves' colored-pencil drawings fixed his reputation as the highbrow jokester who built a bridge



between academic architecture and pop culture.

Bristling with energy and invention, those early drawings, from the 1970s and 1980s, were expertly tossed salads of different historical styles—bulgy pillars from Revolutionary France, round-headed castles from German Romanticism, the rigid axis of the 19th Century Beaux arts—all rendered in acid colors and pushed to comic extremes. The drawings were intentional, calculated slaps in the face: The message, that Modernism was wrong headed and played out, was the war cry of the period.

Graves passed away last week at age 80.

Most disconcerting about Graves's drawings was an underlying sense of archness and preppy superiority, as if the architect himself did not take his own enterprise so seriously. That was anathema to earnest young architectural students bent on saving the world through redesign. Like Erik Satie and Salvador Dali, two other figures who often hid their anxieties behind humor, the element of snark in Graves seems like protective cover. He needed irony as a shield in case someone accused him of unseriousness. His much-quoted saying, "The dialogue of architecture has been centered too long around the idea of truth," was a

cunning trap set for puritans and numbskulls.

Graves made a big public impact with his buildings, including the Humana Tower in Louisville, the Portland Building in Portland, and the Team Disney building in Burbank. (In California, other buildings by Graves included the public library in San Juan Capistrano, the Kavli Building for Theoretical Physics at UC Santa Barbara, the Clos Pegase winery in Napa Valley, and the Aventine complex, including the Hyatt Hotel, in La Jolla.) I disliked those buildings when they were new. They looked like cartoons or over-sized toys, cloying in their cuteness. Graves also built a number of fine projects; my favorite is the library in San Juan Capistrano (1983), organized around a pair of parallel hallways: one path leads through a Mission-inspired façade and arrives at a hacienda style interior courtyard; another pathway, less grand in scale, leads directly into reading rooms.

Graves was also uneven. At times, it seemed he had exhausted the vein of images he had mined from the architecture of late 18th century France, particularly Ledoux, and from German Romanticism. For the Metropolis project (1990), a group of three high-rise office buildings in downtown Los Angeles, Graves proposed a trio of towers covered in meaningless decorative doo-dads. Otherwise conventional, these office buildings looked like big Christmas cookies, encrusted with cake icing, sprinkles and dried fruit. I was dismayed that he had given little consideration to the context of downtown LA. Fortunately, they were never built.

More satisfying was the big Hyatt Hotel (1990) in La Jolla. There, Graves used the cartoon technique to better advantage, using simplified, over-scaled details to maximize the visibility of the façade from the nearby freeway. The Hyatt, in fact, is a more polite variant of the notorious Swan and Dolphin Resort at Disneyworld, Florida (1985). The Disneyworld hotel boasts some features in common with the Hyatt; they include a curving roofline and the use of a stand-alone, castle-like building as an entrance pavilion. (The building type is a borrowing from the German Rundbogenstil.)

Unique to the Disneyworld resort, Graves added 47-foot statues of swans and dolphins that were calculated the

Failure and Success in Michael Graves' Architecture

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raise the hackles of humorless, puritanical Modernists. The statues seemed like Graves had gone too far and broken a taboo. The taboo was not that of “taste;” the entire project is a cannonball aimed at conventional good taste. Rather, the real offense here was the unapologetic use of representational imagery in architecture with a capitol “A.” In puritanical Modernism, there is no place for the human figure, Le Corbusier’s famous Modulor man notwithstanding, let alone animals and plants. Like Robert Venturi and Robert A.M. Stern before him, Graves was working in an architecture of images rather than abstractions. The giant swan and dolphin may have been outrageous in scale but otherwise fit into the context comfortably.

The giant pyramid form on one of the elevations of the Disneyworld capitalizes on the power of simple geometry. Pyramids, of course, mean ancient Egypt, the mysteries of the Masons, Cleopatra movies starring Claudette Colbert and Elizabeth Taylor, the one-eyed pyramid on the dollar bill, and so on. Rather than allude to a symbol through abstraction, Graves imports the symbol itself. Whether we like the Disneyworld project or not – I admire its audacity – we should recognize that much of its power comes from simple devices (i.e. “Platonic” geometry and figurative imagery) that were commonplace to architecture prior to 1940.

One possible conclusion: Representational images are often, if not always, more evocative than abstract forms. Even the current popularity of so-called Mid-Century Modern architecture is based on the fact that these buildings, which were “abstract” when newly built and hence indecipherable to mass culture, have now been transformed by time into something familiar, that is identifiable images and symbols of American culture from another era.

If I think Graves is uneven and only occasionally successful as an architect, he also showed a way that some (if not all) qualities of historic architecture could be transferred

successfully to Modern architecture. Here’s a few:

- The profile or overall contour of a building is more important than its shape, because the profile, unlike the bulges of a sculptural mass, can be clearly seen from a distance.
- Round contours are often more suggestive of mass than mass itself.
- Simple geometry is the basis for architectural rhetoric. His famous tea kettle combines a triangle and a circle, while the over-cute bird figure on the spout lends an image, however coy or campy, to the whistling sound of boiling water.
- Color is admissible in architecture. Given the monochromatic tendency of most new buildings, it may even be advisable.
- Architecture needs to find a way to include figurative imagery without embarrassment.
- A combination of abstraction and figuration is possible in a single work of architecture.
- Popular culture dislikes pure abstraction. The incommunicative quality of many modern buildings makes it necessary to include figurative signage or logos to humanize otherwise uninviting structures.

So rest in peace, Michael Graves. Your legacy, however mixed, awaits re-appraisal. If you sometimes seemed sarcastic, you also raised genuine questions about the theory and practice of current architecture. In addition, you made some suggestions as to how to work around the dead ends of both a flamboyant avant garde that is hostile to its surroundings and the banal, cost-driven mainstream. So maybe you were not entirely unserious, after all.

– MORRIS NEWMAN | APR 3, 2015 ■

