

WINDS OF CHANGE: Putting Planning for Global Warming into Perspective

An outline of a presentation to Sustainable Silicon Valley's "Local Governments: Reducing Greenhouse Gases" Forum on July 9, 2008 by Don Weden, retired Principal Planner, Santa Clara County Planning.
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INTRODUCTION

1. We need to view climate change in a larger context to build community support for effective action.
2. Dealing with climate change will require both mitigation and adaptation.
3. Many different kinds of mitigations will be necessary.
4. Mitigations can be grouped into two basic categories:
 - a. Mitigations related to land use
 - b. Mitigations not related to land use
5. Up until now, most attention has been focused on mitigations not related to land use (with the possible exception of green building).
6. Attention is about to shift to land use, for various reasons, including:
 - a. The California Air Resources Board is reviewing a draft Scoping Plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in California.
 - b. All cities and counties in the Bay Area are preparing updates to their housing elements. Some are also revising their general plans or preparing specific plans. All of these planning activities can be very important tools for addressing greenhouse gas emissions related to land use.
 - c. The State Attorney General's Office has been focusing on the need for cities and counties to assess the impacts of their land use plans on climate change as part of the CEQA (environmental review) process.
7. Dealing with mitigations related to land use is likely to be much more difficult than dealing with mitigations not related to land use because:
 - a. Land use politics are more emotional and contentious
 - b. Community resistance to change is much greater
8. It will be necessary to find constructive ways to build community support for change in order to get adopted and implemented the major changes in land use plans and policies needed to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
9. An essential first step in building community support for major changes in land use involves helping the community to understand why changes are necessary – and the potential consequences of failing to change.
10. Also important will be:
 - a. Increasing community awareness of the links between climate change and other community concerns, and:
 - b. Emphasizing how the land use changes that contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions will also help address other important social, economic, and environmental concerns; in other words, emphasis how these different issues have solutions in common

SUMMARY

1. Global warming poses serious threats to our environment, our economy, our communities, our health, and our quality of life.

2. Global warming is only one of numerous major changes and challenges our local communities need to prepare for.
3. All of these challenges will be affected by how and where we house our future population.
4. We need to plan to become intelligently more urban.
5. Becoming intelligently more urban will require significant adaptations in our local land use plans and policies.
6. Upcoming general plan reviews and housing element updates provide an opportunity to begin to make these necessary changes.
7. Conventional planning approaches may be inadequate to deal with major changes.
8. We will need to become better at building public support to overcome resistance to change.

THE “WINDS OF CHANGE”

1. We face major changes and challenges in the coming years driven by the “winds of change” (i.e. major demographic, economic, and environmental conditions) that will be impacting all of our lives and all our communities.
2. Many of these changes will be “structural” rather than “cyclical”, meaning that we will need to adapt to them, rather than simply wait for conditions to return to “normal.”
 - a. When structural changes occur, conditions generally don’t return to the previous “normal”.
 - b. Examples of structural change include the replacement of the horse and buggy by the automobile; replacement of the typewriter by word processors and computers.
 - c. Global warming, for example, is bringing about a structural change in our climate.
3. Among the major “winds of change” that will be significantly impacting our lives and our communities over the coming years are:
 - a. Population growth
 - b. The aging of the Baby Boom Generation
 - c. Global warming
 - d. Rising energy costs
 - e. Rising food costs

- f. Global economic competition
 - g. The potential for a major natural disaster
 - h. Public health
 - i. Water supply
4. While all of the diverse forces listed above may seem unrelated, they are linked by the fact that they will all be impacted – for better or for worse – by the cumulative impacts of the decisions our local governments make regarding how and where we house our future population.
 5. Among the changes and challenges we will be facing are:
 - a. California’s population is projected to grow over the next several decades by the equivalent of adding another City of Los Angeles every eight years (think “LA 8”).
 - b. Over the next 25 years, the Bay Area’s population is projected to grow by the equivalent of adding two more San Jose’s.
 - c. By 2030, one out of every five residents of the Bay Area will be age 65 or older – a significant percentage of whom will be non-drivers, in a region where there currently are relatively few viable alternatives to the automobile for most residents.
 - d. The era of cheap oil, which has been the foundation for our suburban land use patterns and lifestyles, is coming to an end.
 - e. Achieving California’s goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to combat global warming will require, among many other things, that we reduce total vehicle miles traveled below current levels – at the same time that our state’s population is projected to increase significantly.
 - f. A variety of conditions may continue to force food prices upward.

ADAPTING OUR COMMUNITIES

1. We will be facing major structural changes and challenges over the coming decades.
2. These changes will require major adaptations by our local communities, and particularly in our land use plans and policies.
3. Making some of these necessary adaptations may take many years to plan and implement.

4. We need to get started as soon as possible in planning for these changes and implementing these revised plans.
5. Being “built out” is not a legitimate excuse for communities not to make the necessary changes in their land use plans and policies.
 - a. Healthy, vibrant communities continue to change and evolve, long after all their vacant land has been developed.
 - b. We need to shift our focus from undeveloped land to reusable land – it’s just another form of recycling that is critical to the long term sustainability of our communities.
- k. Allowing for community-by-community customization – not one-size-fits-all solutions
- l. Making it easier to get good development approved – not treating all development proposals the same
3. A primary focus of becoming “intelligently more urban” needs to be the creation of livable, green, urban neighborhoods that are not only great places to live, but that help us meet the major economic, social, and environmental challenges we will be facing over the coming years and decades.
4. Livable, green, urban neighborhoods are one of the key building blocks for creating sustainable communities. Each of the three basic components is equally important.
 - a. The attributes of “livable” neighborhoods include, among other things, being:
 1. Convenient
 2. Safe
 3. Healthy
 4. Diverse
 5. Vibrant
 6. Nurturing
 - b. The attributes of “green” neighborhoods include, among other things, being:
 1. Energy efficient
 2. Water efficient
 3. Waste/pollution minimizing
 4. Nature friendly
 5. Greenhouse gas reducing
 6. Sustainable
 - c. The attributes of “urban” neighborhoods include, among other things, being:
 1. Higher density
 2. Mixed use
 3. Transit oriented
 4. Walkable and bikeable
 5. Synergistic

THE NEED TO BECOME INTELLIGENTLY MORE URBAN

1. We are at a critical transition point between being predominantly suburban communities to becoming somewhat more urban; we need to make the transition successfully and intelligently for our stake and for the sake of future generations.
2. We need to plan to become intelligently more urban by:
 - a. Focusing on livability – not just density
 - b. Focusing on placemaking – not just planning
 - c. Creating great neighborhoods – not just building good individual projects
 - d. Focusing higher densities – not scattering higher densities
 - e. Mixing compatible land uses – not separating land uses
 - f. Planning for people – not just planning for cars
 - g. Increasing housing and mobility choices – not limiting choices
 - h. Protecting and enhancing existing neighborhoods – not threatening existing neighborhoods
 - i. Putting traffic into its proper perspective – not letting it dominate decision making
 - j. Planning for diversity – not exclusivity

WINDS OF CHANGE SUMMARY

1. Major changes are rapidly coming our way, whether we want them to or not.
2. The only question is: How will we respond to these coming changes?
 - a. Will we prepare for these changes and direct them to the benefit of our community?
Or
 - b. Will we ignore these coming changes or try to wish them away until it's too late and the challenges are even greater and the solutions more difficult and more costly?
3. We can't afford to withdraw from these challenges.
4. We can't assume these are other people's problems to solve.
5. We need to realize that we are all in this together and our success will depend on everyone doing their share.
6. We need to be proactive in addressing problems before they become much greater.
7. We can't afford to settle for minor, incremental changes – major changes are needed as soon as possible.
8. We need to move forward with a greater sense of urgency – the changes are proceeding more rapidly than are our efforts to address them.
9. We need to appreciate the great economic, environmental, and social importance of the decisions we make about how and where we will house our future population.
10. We need to face the future with optimism and imagination. We can – if we have the will to do so – make the world a better place.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACHIEVING NEEDED LAND USE CHANGES

1. Our current, relatively low density, automobile-dependent land use patterns are a significant factor contributing to global warming due to greenhouse gas emissions from the large amount of motor vehicle traffic they generate.
2. Almost 45% of the greenhouse gas emissions in the Bay Area come from on-road vehicles.
3. Reducing total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) needs to be one of the major goals of

greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies to mitigate the consequences of global warming.

4. Achieving significant reductions in total VMT will require major changes in land use to make transit, walking, and bicycling viable alternatives to driving.
5. The following strategies can help to bring about the kinds of responsible land use planning and land use changes we will need in order to significantly reduce total VMT and greenhouse gas emissions related to land use:

a. Suggestion #1: Make use of other planning opportunities

1. Although there are efforts currently underway to develop local climate action plans, it is critically important to those seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through local government actions also be aware of and make use of other local government planning opportunities to achieve climate change mitigation goals.
2. The planning and land use decisions made within the next twelve months – particularly through local housing element updates, general plan reviews, and specific plan preparations – will play a major role in determining whether or not our communities are adequately prepared for the major changes that are rapidly reshaping our world – including climate change
3. These other planning activities will determine, to a very large degree how and where housing will be built within every city and county in the region over the next decade or so. Consequently, they will have great influence over whether changes in our land use patterns will enable us to become less dependent on the automobile – which, in turn, will play a major role in determining whether we achieve net reductions in total vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Once this current “window of opportunity” closes, it may be another

decade or more before most communities will again review and significantly revise the plans they adopt. During that time, the “winds of change” will have continued to blow, the impacts of global warming will have continued to worsen, and the problems our communities face may have become even more difficult to solve, if the plans we adopt now prove to be inadequate.

b. Suggestion #2: Focus the community dialogue on future needs, not just current wants

1. Although, in theory, planning projects are supposed to be about the future, the reality is that many of them are essentially dialogues about the present that reflect current community wants, rather than future community needs.
2. In the past, when most changes were cyclical in nature (i.e. things would eventually return to “normal”) and didn’t require significant adaptations, the distinction between current wants and future needs was not necessarily very important. Consequently, it didn’t particularly matter if the outcomes of many planning projects resulted in relatively minor, incremental changes, instead of major ones.
3. But in a time of major structural changes (where conditions aren’t going to return to “normal”), failure to base local planning on future needs rather than current wants can have serious negative consequences for the community, both now and in the future.
4. This distinction between the community’s short term current wants and its long term future needs can also be quite relevant when it comes to the review of individual land development proposals. Often, for example, communities allow long term (and current) needs for more housing to be trumped by current wants to limit traffic, and, as a result, needed housing

development is denied or substantially scaled down.

5. In a critical period when local communities are beginning to experience major structural changes, they need to be having serious, responsible community dialogues about how to adapt to changing conditions and meet future needs by becoming intelligently more urban for the benefit of both current and future generations.
6. Whether local planning projects become dialogues about current community wants or future community needs often depends on the first question that is put before the community as the planning project begins
 - a. Planning projects that begin by asking the traditional question “How can we make our community a better place?” generally elicit and stimulate responses that reflect current wants, rather than future needs, and are usually a significant impediment to achieving changes of a scale and nature necessary to effectively address structural changes
 - b. If we want our planning projects to focus the community dialogue on future needs, rather than current wants, in a time of major structural changes we should begin by asking questions such as: “How can we prepare our community to thrive under the coming changed conditions?”

c. Suggestion #3: Link climate change mitigations with other important issues

1. Although climate change is an extremely important issue, with the potential to have severe consequences for both current and future generations, it is only one of a number of significant changes and challenges we need to be preparing our local communities for.

2. Climate change should not be viewed as an isolated, stand-alone issue with its own, single-purpose solutions.
3. Many of the actions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions – and thus mitigate the future severity of climate change impacts – are also actions that will help us address a variety of other major challenges we are facing, including:
 - a. Reducing the social and economic consequences of rising energy costs
 - b. Improving the quality of life for our aging senior population, many of whom will someday find themselves unable or unwilling to drive, or unable to afford the costs of driving, in communities that currently are very automobile-dependent
4. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to transportation and land use are likely to be more successful if they are linked not just to global warming, but also to the other important problems they will help our communities to address.

d. Suggestion #4: Insist on responsible success criteria

1. Traditionally, the basic criterion for determining the “success” of a land use planning project (e.g. a revision of a local general plan) has been quite undemanding.
2. Often, planning projects have deemed successful if they simply produced a plan that:
 - a. Was somehow considered better than the plan it replaced, or
 - b. Would make the community “a better place.”
3. In a world beginning to experience major structural changes, the bar needs to be set much higher to determine whether planning projects are successful.
4. The basic criterion that planning projects should now be expected to meet is:

- a. “Does the new plan responsibly and effectively prepare the community to meet the major changes and challenges that are rapidly approaching?”
 - b. If the revised plan doesn’t pass that test, it is inadequate and fails to meet the needs of the community’s current and future residents.
5. In addition to the general criterion suggested above, there are other, more specific criteria that local land use plans should meet, including:
 - a. Will the revised plan result in a net reduction of total vehicle miles traveled, below current levels, while accommodating the community’s reasonable share of regional population growth?
 - b. Will the revised plan significantly increase the percentage of the city’s population that lives within reasonable walking distance of a mid- or large-size grocery store?
 6. All of the above criteria (and possibly more) should be established very early in the planning process, to guide the plan’s preparation, and to be used in evaluating the success of the final draft plan before it is adopted.

e. Suggestion #5: Think big! Big challenges require big solutions

1. In times of major changes and big challenges, modest, incremental changes in land use – as typically occur during times of cyclical changes – are inadequate
2. To meet the serious, unprecedented challenges that are rapidly coming our way – including global warming – we need to plan for changes that are larger, more ambitious, and more imaginative than we might otherwise propose
3. The skills, leadership abilities, and imaginations of all of the following throughout the Bay Area are about to be put to a very critical test as important

and infrequent local land use planning activities occur:

- a. Planners
- b. Local officials and other community leaders
- c. Climate change mitigation advocates
- d. Affordable housing advocates
- e. Economic development advocates
- f. Environmental advocates
- g. Seniors' issues advocates
- h. Social justice advocates

4. The outcomes of these important planning activities may affect the economic, social, and environmental well-being of our local communities and the region for years and possibly even decades to come.

5. This is a time when the words of Daniel Burnham are particularly relevant: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood . . . Make big plans, aim high in hope and work."

f. Suggestion #6: Build community support for adoption and implementation

- a. Although we are about to experience major structural changes in the conditions impacting and shaping our communities, and will need to make significant adaptations in our land use plans and policies to prepare for and respond to these changing conditions, making these necessary adaptations will undoubtedly encounter resistance to change from within our communities.
- b. Whether resistance to change is simply an inherent characteristic within the human species, or whether it is a response to perceived threats to our individual self interest, it is a significant factor that needs to be addressed constructively as we prepare our communities for the changes and challenges that are rapidly approaching.
- c. Meeting our future needs will require more than simply proposing solutions (e.g. transit oriented development, affordable housing, etc.) to current

and/or future problems – it will require overcoming or significantly reducing community resistance to changes in land use.

- d. Effectively and constructively reducing resistance to change needs to begin with an understanding of the basic reasons that people tend to resist changes in land use. Most often, it is because they don't see one or more of the following:
 1. The need for change
 2. The benefits of change (or the negative consequences of failing to change)
 3. The potential for change (e.g. they perceive their city to be "built out," and therefore unchangeable)
 4. The opportunity to influence change
- e. Effective land use planning needs to responsibly and creatively address all of these reasons that people tend to resist change.
- f. Thinking in terms of a three-level "Why?, What?, Where and How?" pyramid can also provide useful insights for reducing resistance to change and establishing the supportive community attitudes necessary to achieve major changes in land use plans and policies to address global warming.
 1. The top level of the pyramid is the "Why" level (i.e. Why do we need to change our community?)
 2. The middle level is the "What?" level (i.e. What, in general, do we need to change in our community?)
 3. The bottom level is the "How? and Where?" level (i.e. How and where, specifically, do we need to make changes in our community?)
 4. The pyramid represents a hierarchy in which each level cannot be successfully achieved unless and until the question on the level above it has been successfully answered.

5. We may currently be spending too much time trying to get people to agree with us on the "What's" (reducing driving or making housing more affordable) and the "How's and Where's" (mixed-use, higher density development around transit stations) when most of the public hasn't yet accepted the fact that there is a significant need to change (i.e. the "Why's").
6. In order to move forward, it may be necessary to move back up the pyramid to the "Why?" level of the pyramid and create a critical mass of community understanding and acceptance of the need for change, before seeking approval for the "What's?" and the "Where's? and How's?".
7. A very important element of efforts to address the "Why?" level involves helping the community – and its local leaders – to see the critical links between our local housing policies and the major changes and challenges we are facing (including global warming, the aging of our population, the end of cheap oil, rising food prices, economic competitiveness, public safety, public health, etc.)
8. Unless and until we have made significant progress at the "Why?" level, it will be more difficult to achieve meaningful, lasting success at the "What?" and the "Where and How?" levels.
- g. To overcome resistance to change, it may also be helpful to point out to community leaders and the community the potential negative consequences of failing to plan for change, including:
 1. Future needs that will not be met
 2. Unaddressed problems that may be more difficult and/or more expensive to solve in the future
 3. Missed opportunities to improve the community
 4. Reduction or loss of existing competitive economic advantages
 5. Unplanned changes that will still occur – but without the benefits that planned change would have brought
 6. Reduced quality of life for current and future residents
 7. Unfulfilled obligations to others to address shared problems

CONCLUSION

1. Through our planning and land use decisions, we are creating a legacy that will significantly impact the lives of future generations and the severity of the climate change impacts they experience.
2. How will future generations judge the wisdom, foresight, and compassion of the decisions we will be making over the next year as all cities and counties in the Bay Area update their Housing Elements, and in some cases, revise their General Plans, or prepare specific plans for selected areas?

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