

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



Winds of Change:

Adapting General Plans to the Changing Realities of the 21st Century

2007-08 SEASON: FORUM #7
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2008
HISTORIC LOBBY OF THE FOX THEATRE
2215 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On April 2, 2008, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit "Communities by Design" held the seventh presentation of the 2007-2008 Forum season. The Forum featured a presentation by **Don Weden**, retired Principal Planner from Santa Clara County, on "Winds of Change: Adapting General Plans to the Changing Realities of the 21st Century." Mr. Weden addressed some of the major changes and challenges the future holds for us and how the general plan process will require significant adaptation in order to prepare us for what is to come.

Mr. Weden began his presentation by differentiating between two types of changes, cyclical and structural. He described cyclical changes as those which may require little to no adjustments, such as the moon and sun cycles, and unemployment rates. Structural changes, on the other hand, are those that require major adjustments because, unlike cyclical changes, after structural changes, things will not return to normal. The break up of the Soviet Union or the replacement of horses by the automobile are considered structural changes.

Mr. Weden emphasized that we cannot afford to ignore structural changes because they will require major adaptations. And, in the case of land use, these adaptations will require a number of years to plan and implement.

"We will need to become better at building public support to overcome resistance to change."

-Don Weden

The Winds of Change

Mr. Weden identified seven “Winds of Change” that he believes are bringing structural changes: 1) population growth, 2) aging of Baby Boomers, 3) global warming, 4) energy costs, 5) economic competition, 6) natural disasters, and 7) public health. His discussion focused on the first four.

What all seven have in common, Mr. Weden emphasized, is that they are all directly related to the decisions we will be making about how and where we house our future population.

Population Growth in the United States and California

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of the United States will reach 400 million in the year 2043 – an increase of 100 million people within a 35 year period.

California’s population is forecast to grow by over 14 million within the next thirty years, according to the California Department of Finance. This would constitute an increase of about 41%. Mr. Weden help put this into perspective by using two easy to remember terms, “LA 8” and “SJ 2”. “LA 8” referring to an increase to California’s population equal to the City of Los Angeles every eight years, or another City of San José every two years (SJ 2), which equates to 10 more San José’s in the next 20 years.

As population grows, there are some other underlying changes that should be considered. Household composition is changing and households with children are a shrinking minority of all household types. Only one-third of U.S. households have children under 18 years of age; two-thirds do not. 25% of all households are single person households.

Aging of Baby Boomers

Seniors are quickly becoming a much larger percentage of the population. By 2030, almost one out of five Californians will be over the age of 65. The aging population will have major impacts throughout our society, including our workforce, our economy, health care, social services, transportation, housing, recreation, volunteerism, and politics.

“For some seniors, urban living is choice. For others, it is a necessity. ”

-Don Weden

To accommodate the aging population, there is a need to increase efforts to provide more housing choices. Low density, automobile-dependent

neighborhoods do not meet the needs of all individuals. Current housing trends do not seem to accommodate the fact that 1 out of 5 Americans over the age of 65 do not drive. How we design our communities affects the daily life of these non-driving seniors in significant ways. Compared to driving seniors, non-driving seniors made:

- 12% fewer trips to the doctor
- 59% fewer shopping trips or trips to restaurants
- 65% fewer trips for social, family or religious activities

Only 1 out of 14 seniors living in low density neighborhoods walk on any given day, compared to 1 out of 3 seniors living in higher density neighborhoods. The lack of senior mobility affects not only seniors, but their adult children as well. Walkable, senior-friendly neighborhoods benefit

“There is a strong link between land use and happiness in old age. ”

-Don Weden

everyone, not just seniors. If we were to set our goals on creating senior-friendly neighborhoods and senior-friendly cities, we would be not only benefitting our seniors, we would be benefitting our entire community.

Global Warming

Mr. Weden presented a quick overview of global warming and the impacts it will have. Global warming will impact our water supply, food supply, health and natural environment. Rise in sea level within the next 100 years is estimated to be between 1 to 3 feet, which will impact local wetland ecosystems and the potential for flooding of inland communities as winter stormwater runoff backs up within local creeks.

According to Mr. Weden, the three basic responses to global warming are mitigation, adaption and suffering. The sooner and more we mitigate, and less we will have to adapt and suffer. Three major mitigation strategies include improvements in vehicle fuel efficiency, smart land use and intelligent transportation, and changing the sources of our electricity supply.

Mr. Weden identified our land use patterns as a significant contributor to global warming. One of the major goals of smart land use and intelligent transportation is the reduction of total vehicle miles traveled (VMT), while accommodating population growth. Current land use patterns contribute to the total VMT, which impact the number of CO2 emissions released, which is directly related to global warming. 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in the Bay Area come from on-road vehicles and it is projected that VMT in the Bay Area will grow faster than population, unless we change our land use patterns.

The bottom line is that real results will be necessary in order to reduce global warming. In order for this to become a reality, it may be necessary to look beyond the basic strategies to reduce VMT. Getting drivers to drive less and increasing passengers per vehicle may simply not be enough. Major land use changes will be required, including bringing jobs, housing, and other trip destinations closer together and making transit, bicycling, and walking more viable options.

Energy Costs

Mr. Weden stated that cheap oil has served as the foundation of suburbia. The U.S. has only 5% of the world's population, but uses 25% of the world's oil. Out of this, two thirds gets consumed for transportation. The era of cheap oil is coming to an end as we approach the point where the world's total production of oil is expected to level off and begin to decrease. It is widely agreed that this reduction will occur within most of our lifetimes and will bring with it a rise of energy costs. Compounding the problems is the fact that it will take a long time to transition to alternative fuels, so we need to begin preparing for it now.

Current land use is a significant part of the problem because it builds oil dependency into our land use patterns, which increases our economic vulnerability to the rise in oil prices. We must begin making our land use patterns more energy efficient.

Responding to Change

Mr. Weden emphasized that we will face major changes and challenges in the coming years driven by the "Winds of Change" and that such change is not a choice. The only choice we have is how we respond to these changes. For our own sake and for future generations, we need to plan responsibly to meet these changes and challenges, not

ignore them or deny that they are occurring. Mr. Weden went on to identify the major adaptations that we should be focused on: opportunities for change, the need to become intelligently more urban, and General Plan reviews and housing element updates.

The opportunity for changes is there. As reported by the Brookings Institute, "Nearly half of what will be the built environment in the US in 2030 doesn't even exist yet."

"We've got to get over the 'hide the density' game. "

-Don Weden

Mr. Weden recommends that we become "intelligently more urban" by changing our focus to: livability, not just density; place making, not just planning; planning for

people, not just cars; protecting and enhancing existing neighborhoods, and not threatening them. Ultimately, according to Mr. Weden, becoming intelligently more urban is about creating livable, green, urban neighborhoods.

Paradigm Shift for General Plan Reviews

Mr. Weden recommends changing the way we do General Plan reviews and housing element updates. General plans should focus on meeting the needs of the 21st Century, not just making incremental improvements over what our plans call for today. The basic challenges associated with General plans include changing conditions, balancing current and future needs, and overcoming resistance to change.

Mr. Weden made it clear that the conventional approaches associated with a General Plan or housing element update may be inadequate. All too often, cities and counties are doing "squeaky wheel" general plan reviews and/or "smoke and mirrors" housing element updates.

In order to conduct a successful General Plan Review or housing element update, Mr. Weden asserts that you need to do the following:

- Start by taking a long look at the future
- Remember that it's not just about us
- Start with the right DNA
- Frame the purpose effectively
- Define "success" as meeting future challenges
- Base your vision on future needs, not just current wants
- Understand resistance to change
- Build community support for major changes
- Engage the community
- Make change visible
- Recognize the central importance of housing
- Don't let traffic block your vision
- Remember that land use trumps technology
- Develop implementation metrics (AFTER the plan is adequate)
- Make the revised plan easy to implement

If we can make these changes, Mr. Weden believes we can successfully prepare for the structural changes that are headed our way, knowing that future generations will be impacted by the decisions we make today.