

Land Use Planning and Disaster Recovery

Objective: To develop a strategy for addressing land use planning challenges during the recovery period after a disaster

While many jurisdictions in the Bay Area have well-defined plans to address response (the days and weeks following an earthquake), most have not developed comprehensive recovery plans for the months and years after an earthquake. There are many reasons for this. It is difficult to determine before the earthquake what will be damaged after the earthquake occurs. Recovery planning requires cooperation across departments that may not have a history of working together. Moreover, recovery planning is not typically a well-funded activity for local governments.

Many Bay Area jurisdictions have not even begun to tackle these issues, in no small part because their regular land use planning functions are impacted by enormous budgetary pressures facing local governments.

Nevertheless, it is important that we begin work on long term recovery. In September of 2011, FEMA released a draft of the National Disaster Recovery Framework which attempts to define core recovery principles as well as the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies, recovery coordinators and other stakeholders; and guidance for implementing and managing recovery. Here in the Bay Area, the City of San Francisco has made significant headway on its plans for long-term recovery through its Resilient SF Initiative. The Resilient SF Initiative is run by the City Administrator's Office and the Department of Emergency Management. While much remains to be done, these projects are steps in the right direction.

We know that a major earthquake is going to present new land use planning and development challenges for local jurisdictions. A major earthquake will cause severe building and infrastructure damage and ground failures due to landslides, liquefaction and lateral spreading. Existing plans and codes may not provide a sufficient planning response to the damage a community will likely face. Additionally, the existing tools of planning may not be sufficient to address the challenges. While we cannot predict with precision where the challenges are going to be or all that they will entail, we do know that we need to begin planning now.

This paper will focus on the land-use challenges faced by local governments in the post-disaster recovery period. Local jurisdictions are likely to face a number of challenges, including the following:

1. The earthquake is going to present new land use planning and development challenges caused by severe building damage and ground failure. We cannot predict with precision where those challenges are going to be or all that they will entail but we know that areas subject to faulting, liquefaction and landslides will demand immediate decisions related to repair and reconstruction in those areas. Our current plans and planning processes are likely to be inadequate to address these recovery challenges.

2. The codes and plans that are in existence at the time of the disaster are likely to be the ones that govern how our rebuilding occurs, but in many jurisdictions these codes and plans are outdated, and others are not actionable.
3. The current ways that stakeholder and citizens are involved in developing and adopting plans and making development decisions may not work well in compressed time environment of post-disaster recovery and with the pressures to rebuild quickly.
4. The environmental review procedures of CEQA also may not work well in the compressed time environment of post-disaster recovery. NEPA procedures may also hamper recovery.
5. California's Redevelopment Law provides the mechanism by which local governments can more expeditiously create post disaster redevelopment districts. Now that Redevelopment has been abolished, the legal and institutional framework may need to be recreated.
6. There are certain problems that will require regional cooperation and coordination across jurisdictional lines. Transportation and other lifelines systems that cross city boundaries and connect to regional systems will be key.
7. Recovery challenges take place at a number of different scales – the site, the neighborhood, the city and the region. Approaches to recovery must address needs at all these different scales.

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