Energized by an abundance of INNOVATIVE IDEAS,
the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project
harnessed the commitment and creativity of our ***diverse population***
to both VISUALIZE and chart a course for a BETTER FUTURE.


PETER CADE


SF BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

YEARS IN THE MAKING: CREATING THE VISION

In the waning months of the 20th century, a number of visionary Bay Area leaders began looking ahead to the next century: to what life will be like in the coming decades when an expected 1 million more residents and 1 million more jobs are added to this burgeoning region. In the face of the growing pains we face today — lack of affordable housing, crowded roadways and shrinking open space — they began envisioning where everyone will live and work in 2020. How will we maintain the region's beauty, natural resources, diversity and quality of life if the current growth pattern of spreading ever outward continues?

Is it possible, they asked, to change the course of current growth: to find ways for the Bay Area to accommodate its expanding populace, provide adequate housing, improve transportation, and at the same time protect the environment and preserve open space?

A tall order indeed. Challenged by the impending need and inspired by new styles of development, committed Bay Area citizens and organizations joined with local and regional government agencies to undertake the task of investigating if and how the Bay Area can grow smarter.

The investigation began in 1999, when the Bay Area's five regional agencies[1] — those responsible for transportation planning, environmental protection and regional planning — came together to promote and nurture seeds of "smart growth" that were cropping up throughout the region. At the same time, the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development, a coalition of 40 organizations representing business, the environment, social equity and government, embarked on an ambitious effort to develop public consensus and support for a "regional livability footprint," that is, a preferred land-use pattern that could direct the Bay Area toward a more sustainable future. In 2000, the regional agencies and the Bay Area Alliance combined their outreach efforts and created the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project.

Over the next two years, elected officials, business and community leaders, environmentalists, social equity advocates, planners, analysts, mapmakers, agency representatives and interested citizens devoted thousands of hours to the project. They organized, met, planned, debated, generated ideas, drew maps, made projections and analyzed outcomes. More than 2,000 residents from throughout the region attended daylong Saturday workshops held in each of the Bay Area's nine counties in fall 2001 and spring 2002. Participants conceptualized how future growth should occur in their individual neighborhoods and counties, and in the region as a whole.

Never in the history of the Bay Area have so many individuals, organizations and agencies joined forces to solve the region's growth problems. Unlike prior attempts to develop regional solutions, this project was organized from the start around the precept that widespread support was essential. In addition to a high level of commitment from the private sector and local and regional government agencies, the involvement of local communities was a key ingredient. The interest, creative ideas and participation by residents from Gilroy to Guerneville, and from Pacifica to Pleasanton provide a solid base that enables the region to move forward with a clear sense of direction.

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[1]*Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and Regional Water Quality Control Board.*

Although much work remains, the vision developed in the public workshops represents a new way of thinking about the region's course of growth: specifically about whether and how it can be altered to meet the needs of future generations without sacrificing the quality of life we enjoy today. This alternative portrays a Bay Area yet to be, envisioned by current residents who confronted the challenge of determining how and where growth could occur. These residents maximized opportunities they saw to effect change, and designed a viable "smart growth" alternative they believe is strong enough to channel decision-making and, at the same time, flexible enough to incorporate adjustments.

Far more than a planning exercise, the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project aims to change the underlying fiscal and regulatory structure that is at the root of current growth patterns. Project participants recognized that for a number of reasons, land-use planning in the region today is often unbalanced. Local officials of financially strapped jurisdictions frequently review new development based on whether projects will increase local revenues or cost money to service. All too often, the potential flow of new retail sales taxes into local coffers is more attractive than building housing. At the same time, environmental regulations designed to protect undeveloped areas can have the effect of impeding infill development that could reduce sprawl. And some government funding formulas for infrastructure favor large, sparsely developed areas over densely populated, but geographically smaller, areas.

Examples of how current growth patterns can change and how regional agencies and state and federal governments can support more sustainable land-use decisions constitute the heart of this report. New incentives and regulatory changes will dictate, in large measure, how and when the Bay Area can begin to grow smarter.

WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

Smart growth does not fit a single definition, and the land-use scenario developed by workshop participants and described in this report is only one of the ways to achieve smart growth in the Bay Area. A common thread among different views is development that revitalizes central cities and older suburbs, supports and enhances public transit, promotes walking and bicycling, and preserves open spaces and agricultural lands. Smart growth seeks to revitalize the already-built environment and, to the extent necessary, to foster efficient development at the edges of the region, with the goal of creating more livable communities with sufficient housing for the region's workforce.

Participants in the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project did not have to begin their work from scratch. There are already movements afoot and changes taking place throughout the Bay Area and the nation. Faceless strip malls are giving way to attractive, mixed-use plazas that invite walking and social interaction. High-density housing is cropping up near transit stations. Older, inner city areas are receiving facelifts and an infusion of financial investment. And development in new areas often contains elements of smart growth that its predecessors even a decade ago did not.

Smart Growth Meets Sustainability

It is these types of smart growth projects that will enable the Bay Area to meet the three key goals of sustainability for future generations: a prosperous economy, a quality environment and social equity.

The Economy

The Bay Area economy is cyclic, and is projected to recover from its current slowdown and to grow stronger over the next two decades and beyond. The region's prosperity, however, is shadowed by a persistent housing shortage. Housing construction has not kept pace with job growth, and local jurisdictions have zoned for only about half the amount of housing needed for the employees who will fill an anticipated 1 million new jobs by 2020.

CHRONOLOGY

1999

Regional agencies discuss "Smart Growth Strategy" to develop incentives, and Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development plans "Regional Livability Footprint" project.

2000

The two projects merge public outreach efforts.

Regionwide kick-off workshop

2001

Meetings in each county to discuss local growth issues and opportunities to collaborate

Bay Area planning directors review project.

First round of public workshops

Regionwide meeting to distill Round One workshop products

2002

Analysis of three regionwide alternatives

Second round of public workshops

Adoption of Smart Growth Vision and more specific Smart Growth Scenario

Efforts commence to advocate for needed incentives and regulatory changes.

ABAG develops policy-based projections using Smart Growth Scenario as starting point.

2003

ABAG Executive Board considers adopting smart growth policy-based projections.

GROWTH TRENDS

If current trends continue, the Bay Area will grow by 1 million residents and 1 million jobs between now and the year 2020. On the surface, that sounds like a perfect balance, but take a closer look. Already there are more jobs than workers who live in the Bay Area, with some 165,000 commuters flowing into the region each day from outlying areas. Since not all of the new residents predicted for 2020 will be part of the workforce, the worker/job gap is projected to worsen, with the number of in-commuters expected to grow. This trend has ominous implications for housing demand, traffic, air quality and open space, both within and outside the Bay Area.

An argument could be made for addressing this imbalance by curtailing the region's economy and job expansion. But fully half of the projected new residents will result not from in-migration from other areas, but from births outpacing deaths. In other words, the smart growth debate is not only about accommodating newcomers, but also about leaving livable communities for our own children and our grandchildren.

Workers today struggle to find housing they can afford; businesses face pressure to meet resulting wage needs and often have trouble recruiting employees.

By its very nature, the concept of smart growth can match the goals of a sustainable future for the Bay Area. The region's economy will benefit when its severe housing shortage is addressed, and workers can afford to live nearer their jobs. The smart growth vision developed by workshop participants does more than bridge the spatial jobs/housing gap. It provides enough units, particularly of affordable housing, to accommodate the 1 million new Bay Area residents expected by 2020, as well as enough units to house workers and their families who otherwise would have to commute from neighboring counties.

The Environment

The Bay Area's natural beauty is one of its strongest draws. Abundant opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, from coastal beaches to the Bay, oak-covered hillsides and redwood canyons, are treasured by its residents as irreplaceable assets. If the Bay Area continues to grow as it has in the recent past, however, 83,000 acres of currently undeveloped land could be covered with new structures by 2020. Amounting to an 11 percent increase in the urbanized Bay Area — an area two-and-one-half times the size of San Francisco — this development would erode farmland, greenbelts and other open spaces.

Current trends also threaten Bay Area air quality. Likewise, the region's per capita water consumption will increase under current trends that project the construction of primarily detached, single-family development in the Bay Area's hotter, inland areas.

The smart growth vision helps sustain the region's environment by promoting more compact development that can accommodate a projected population increase and at the same time, preserve much of our remaining open space. By combining shops, offices and housing in mixed-use and mixed-income neighborhoods, and locating housing and job centers within walking and bicycling distance of transit stations, smart growth will improve access to employment and services, and shorten commutes. As a result, there will be less demand to expand and build new roadways.

Social Equity

Social equity aims to ensure that people of all income levels have access to housing they can afford, good schools, reliable transportation, various types of employment, and toxic-free communities. Social equity means that all residents — particularly those in low-income brackets — benefit from new investment in their communities, gain equal access to economic opportunities and have a chance to actively participate in community planning efforts.

While recognizing the challenges to making housing, services and employment available in lower income communities, workshop participants envisioned how smart growth can reduce some of the current inequities. Construction of housing for a mix of incomes throughout the region can provide more geographic choices for low-income residents. Public transportation improvements and mixed-use development along transit lines can enhance job access, and greater housing densities in impoverished neighborhoods can spur creation of basic services such as grocery stores and child care.

While they endorsed the concept of linking smart growth to social equity, workshop participants emphasized the need to protect existing residents from displacement. Smart growth means careful management to avoid triggering changes that disrupt communities and lead to displacement and economic and social isolation.

THE WORKSHOP PROCESS

The project broadened its reach in the fall of 2001, when more than 1,000 residents participated in Saturday workshops held in each of the nine counties. Some came in their professional capacity as elected officials, planners, developers and environmental and social equity advocates. Others came as representatives of neighborhood groups or out of concern for their children's future. The mix of diverse interests made for lively discussions and negotiations about the pace, character and shape of development in their communities. Using large maps of their county, participants identified promising locations for various types of new development. Their suggestions were then fed into a special computer program that illustrated the impacts of decisions on the county's housing supply, open space, transit accessibility and other measures of livability, and allowed participants to adjust their maps accordingly.

Each county workshop produced up to a dozen schemes for accommodating future growth in a smarter way, with a cumulative total of 100 countywide scenarios for the Bay Area. The project team spent weeks combing through the proposals, searching for common threads and ultimately distilling them into three thematic smart growth alternatives for the region (see box at near right). The team then invited planning officials and business, environmental and social equity leaders from throughout the region's nine counties to review the draft alternatives. Based on this free-flowing discussion, the team made revisions to the draft alternatives to reflect local ideas and concerns.

While offering different visions of a future Bay Area, each of the three alternatives promoted the goals of smart growth. Each included housing for the million new residents expected by 2020, plus housing for workers who otherwise would commute from neighboring counties. Each allowed for expected economic growth, and at the same time, by channeling growth into a more compact and balanced development pattern, consumed less greenfield land than is currently projected.

THE SMART GROWTH ALTERNATIVES

The **Central Cities** alternative located compact, walkable, mixed-use and mixed-income development in the region's urban cores (San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose) and in each county's largest city or cities. It also emphasized growth around existing public transit stations and avoided development in outlying areas by concentrating growth in dense, vibrant cities.

The **Network of Neighborhoods** alternative called for development in many of the same locations as the first alternative, but at lower densities. Additional compact, walkable, mixed-use and mixed-income development took place in other existing communities, along an expanded public transit network and on major corridors. This alternative envisioned a rail renaissance, with new and old stations surrounded by a range of diverse types of housing, jobs and services.

The **Smarter Suburbs** alternative proposed compact, walkable, mixed-use and mixed-income development in many of the same places as the first and second alternatives, but at still lower densities. Additional growth occurred at the region's edges at higher densities than the current norm and with a better balance of jobs and housing than is typical of existing or planned new suburbs.

Each of these three alternatives represented a departure from the "current trends base case," a term coined to describe the region's future growth if nothing is done to chart a new course. The base case fails to provide sufficient housing for an increased population and workforce, resulting in continued rapid growth in outlying areas, increased long-distance commuting and further environmental degradation. It envisions development focused in edge communities, with residential areas largely segregated from other uses and continued reliance on the automobile as the primary mode of travel.

CHRISS POULSEN

PROJECT GOALS

Create a smart growth land-use vision for the Bay Area to minimize sprawl, provide adequate and affordable housing, improve mobility, protect environmental quality and preserve open space.

Identify and advocate for the regulatory changes and incentives needed to accomplish these objectives.

Develop 20-year land-use and transportation projections based on the vision and the likely impact of the new incentives — projections that will in turn guide the infrastructure investments of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and other regional partners.

*The **biggest challenge** will be to enact the FISCAL INCENTIVES & **regulatory changes** necessary to make smart growth more than a good idea.*

PULL-OUTS

- Map. The map at the back of this report indicates the types and locations of future development as proposed by workshop participants, as well as areas to be protected as open space and agricultural land.
- Legislative Update. Central to the smart growth process are the fiscal incentives and regulatory changes needed to get there, described on pages 13-18 and in the pocket inside the front cover of this report.

The three alternatives were put to the test to see how they measured up in terms of promoting a livable and sustainable lifestyle in the Bay Area circa 2020. An extensive analysis examined the impacts of each on the environment, transportation, housing, jobs/housing balance and social equity.

The analysis further estimated the feasibility of each scenario, as well as the incentives, regulatory changes and other public policy changes identified by workshop participants that would be needed to make any smart growth process a reality.

Alternatives Report

In the spring of 2002, a comprehensive *Alternatives Report* describing the three smart growth strategies was published, thus heralding the start of a second round of county-level public forums. More than 1,000 residents, the majority of them new to the process, attended the Saturday sessions held in April and May. At each Round Two county workshop, participants voted on one alternative as the starting point for further fine-tuning. They then developed and agreed on guidelines for modifying their choice, and with the aid of county maps, adjusted this alternative to bring it closer to their vision of their particular county's future.

Regionwide Vision

Following the Round Two workshops, the nine countywide alternatives were stitched together to create a single regionwide smart growth land-use vision. The regionwide vision incorporates the choices and decisions made by participants in the nine county workshops. It reflects their selections of mixed, matched and changed alternative growth scenarios appropriate for each county.

The resulting portrait of the Bay Area's future shows a *pattern* of growth that, by and large, looks like Alternative 2, the Network of Neighborhoods. The *amount* of growth, however, varies quite a bit from county to county. The regionwide map depicts higher densities in major urban areas and a proliferation of compact, mixed-use and mixed-income neighborhoods along transit corridors, particularly near transit stations, as well as in town centers and in a handful of peripheral areas. This pattern of growth is far from a "cookie cutter" overlay of development on the region, however, and the smart growth scenario clearly shows how the amount of housing and job growth varies from county to county. This view reflects the vision of workshop participants who in some counties chose to reduce development foreseen under Alternative 2, while participants in other counties increased it.

In August 2002, the project steering committee (made up of locally elected officials who sit on the boards of the five regional agencies) adopted an illustrative, written description of the smart growth vision of workshop participants. In a separate action, they accepted the specific patterns of growth that participants had identified for each county as a starting point to guide ABAG as they develop a policy-based (rather than trends-based) set of 20-year jobs/housing projections for the region.

NEXT STEPS

In fall and winter 2002, local jurisdictions and others will review these smart growth policy-based projections as they evolve. In early 2003, the ABAG Executive Board will consider adopting these alternative projections. If adopted, they will become the backbone of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's *2004 Regional Transportation Plan*, the document that will guide transportation investments in the region for years to come, as well as the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's clean air plans and other regional plans.

To build on the momentum that has been generated throughout the Bay Area for the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project, an ongoing public education and engagement campaign will be spearheaded by the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development.

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge facing the project will be to enact the fiscal incentives and regulatory changes necessary to make smart growth more than a good idea. ABAG will work together with the other regional agencies, the Bay Area Alliance and local governments throughout the region to develop and pursue needed policy changes. It will take time to accomplish the goals, but the path has been laid out, and a critical mass of Bay Area residents believes it is time to begin.