

California Planning Roundtable Launches a Reinventing of the General Plan: *An Ambitious and Interactive Project of the CPR*

By Craig Beebe and Elaine Costello

The Challenge

The General Plan, California's most fundamental local long-range planning document, needs to be reinvented. As communities grapple with financially strapped governments, job loss, unaffordable housing, congestion, and climate change, many are struggling to find the right approach. The General Plan should be the best tool to tackle and address these and other issues in the comprehensive way most likely to bring about needed for truly sustainable change. Yet the General Plan is too often, viewed as a costly, complex and inflexible requirement, burdened by cumbersome legislative mandates and changes, and vulnerable to legal and political challenge. Many General Plans are ill-equipped to address regional challenges such as climate change, air quality and transportation. As the economic, environmental, and social needs of our cities and counties are fundamentally transformed and have evolved in unpredictable ways, the General Plan too must be renewed to meet the new challenges we face.

That is why, with support from the APA California, the California Planning Roundtable (CPR) has undertaken an ambitious and wide-ranging project to address the current weaknesses of the General Plan. CPR, a group of public, private and academic sector planners, aims to build on the great potential that already exists within the General Plan process and find new paths for the future. This project, which began after a lively salon discussion at the 2008 APA California Conference in Los Angeles, aims to do more than suggest mild revisions to current General Plan legislation and policy. Ultimately, CPR hopes to entirely *reinvent* the General Plan, transforming it to become an essential tool for California communities in the coming century.

Building On What Works: The "Incubator"

The initial phase of reinventing the General Plan has consisted of gathering "Great Models" of the best parts of existing General Plans from cities, towns, and counties across the state, and to include in a web-based "Incubator." After a formal process of peer review to ensure quality, these Great Models are now ready to share with the public. Available at www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org, these incubators contain CPR's first four Great Models, with more under preparation. These models go beyond the usual collection of elements, EIRs, and technical data, to pursue innovative visions, tools, and approaches to planning processes. The Incubator models include plans that utilize the power of the Internet to reach their constituents and hold officials accountable, that set specific benchmarks for sometimes imprecise issues such as sustainability and community character, that approach growth management and public participation in new ways, and that employ strong awareness of regionalism and quality of life.

By utilizing the power of the Internet, CPR hopes to have the models be more than a stale packet of Best Practices, and CPR does not intend for the Incubator to evaluate or endorse every aspect of the Plan highlighted. As its name suggests, the Incubator is a catalyst, highlighting only the most innovative, exciting, and truly transformative features of the model Plans in a user-friendly, readable format. The use of "tabs" allows readers to quickly see the 3-5 features CPR members found truly outstanding. Where appropriate, images display the important maps, charts, and photos that were integral to understanding the Plan's appeal or the communities themselves. For those seeking more information, frequent links direct readers to explanatory pages or directly to the Plans themselves.

The Incubator is a first step to seeing what is already possible under current General Plan law and policy, and CPR hopes it will inspire communities across the Golden State to pursue new avenues when undertaking their own General Plan Updates. The Incubator will continue to grow with more models in the future, and moreover, CPR is seeking contributions from its readership and suggestions for other Great Models to consider. Information on how to participate is on the site.

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Next Steps: Pursuing the Reinvention

With the incubator online and continuing to expand, CPR enters the second phase of the project, moving toward policy and potentially legislative reform of the General Plan itself. CPR members are discussing and preparing a document, building on the lessons of the Incubator, which will outline the most prominent strengths and weaknesses of current General Plan law and policy. This document, and others like it, will be shared with the public so that stakeholders from a broad spectrum can comment and contribute ideas and responses to its contents.

This document and others like it will be posted on a blog at www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org, where we hope you will participate in sharing your thoughts, experiences, and ideas for pursuing new paths for the General Plan.

CPR will then build off of this discussion to create a set of Principles for what a reinvented General Plan should be able to do for our communities and citizens. Finally, CPR will begin working toward whatever reforms are necessary to make such a Plan possible, not just for the communities with the money, time, and expertise to make it happen, but for *all* California communities.

It is possible that the changing realities of planning in California will mean that the General Plan will need to be reinvented in a way that leaves it almost unrecognizable from how it has existed for the last half-century. This is an ambitious and long-term undertaking. However, CPR is confident that now is the time to act to reinvent the potential, the vision, and the power of the General Plan, and with your help, CPR believes it is possible.

Planners on the Move



Mitch Marken



John W. Chowderly

The planning consultancy of **Jacobson & Wack** wishes to share the joy of celebrating their 30th anniversary of exclusively serving the zoning needs of local governments by not having a big party. The principals, **Bruce Jacobson** and **Paul Wack, AICP**, wish to share this milestone with our colleagues and friends, by asking for donations to the California Planning Foundation (CPF), in memory of Paul Crawford, in support of their effort to provide scholarships to deserving planning students in California. Please see the CPF web site for more information on how to donate:

<http://www.californiaplanningfoundation.org/donations.html>.

Environmental Science Associates (ESA) is pleased to announce that **Mitch Marken, Ph.D., LEED AP**, Director of ESA's cultural resources practice, has been promoted to vice president. To learn more about ESA, visit the website at www.esassoc.com.

PMC is pleased to announce that **John W. Cowderly** has been named as its Chief Operating Officer. For additional information about PMC visit www.pmcworld.com.

Tony Witt is proud to announce his retirement after 27 years with the City of Claremont. Mr. Witt can be reached at tonywitt@gmail.com.

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