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# Reinventing the General Plan: Initiating a Second Planning Revolution for California Communities

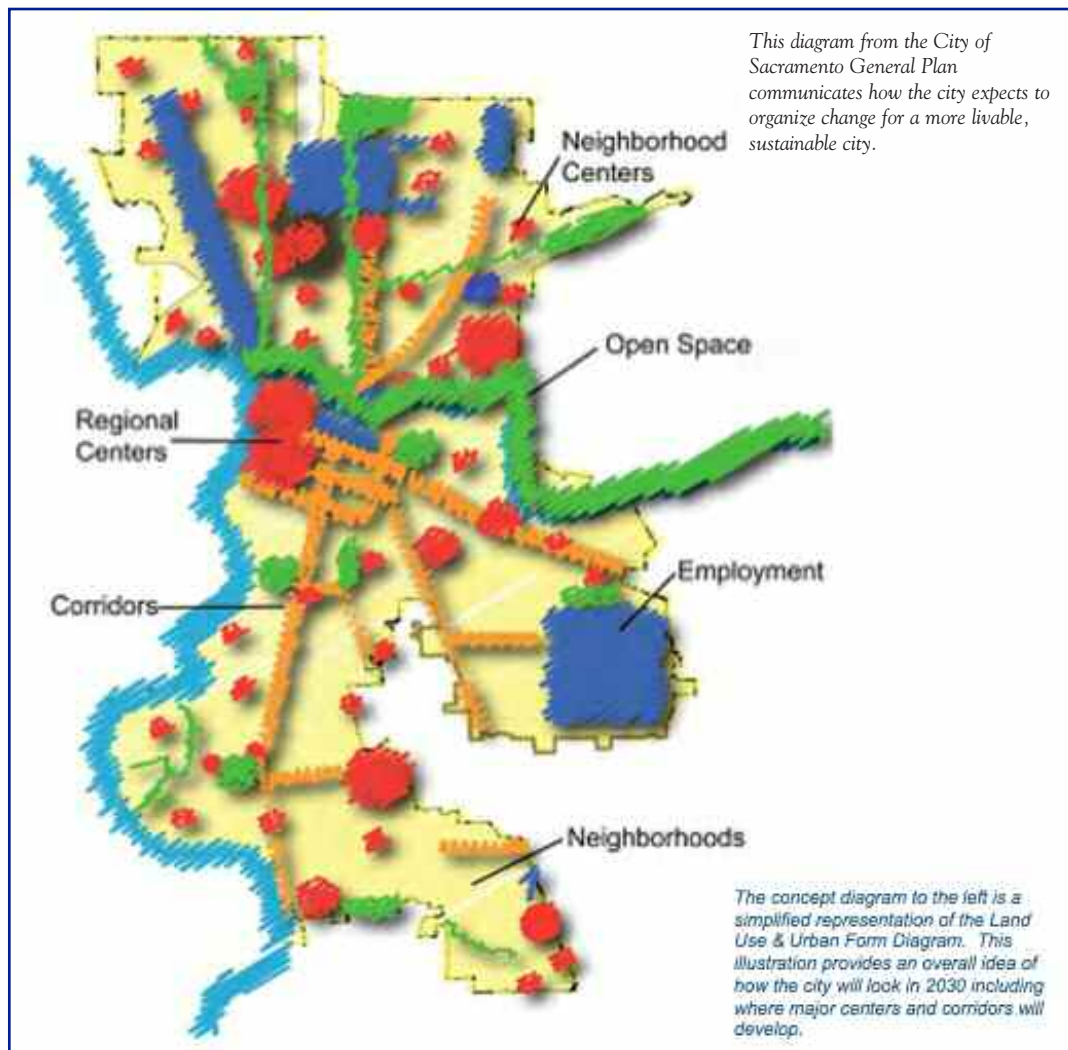
Since the days of Burnham and Olmsted, long-range planning has been the key method for communities to identify and pursue great visions for their future. For a long time, California was a leader in this central task of local planning, with its mandates and guidelines for General Plans for every city and county in the state, and its requirements for environmental protection and a balance between development and conservation.

Recently, however, communities throughout the state have struggled with this essential task of long-range policymaking, as they face significant political, fiscal, and legal challenges to completing their General Plans. For some communities, the General Plan has become an obligatory task undertaken to meet the basic legal requirements of the state, and nothing more. Others postpone their updates, lest they be buried in logistical and legal challenges that can limit their ability to carry out essential duties of government. Meanwhile, communities are facing environmental, demographic, and economic challenges that are growing and changing in ways that seem to be beyond the reach of the General Plan as it stands today. Climate change, air pollution, and the increasing uncertainty of water supplies, to name just a few issues, are uncovering the potential limits of the General Plan's power and testing its relevance in the coming century.

However, changing times and new challenges do not mean that we must abandon

the California General Plan. For without comprehensive visions, our communities will continue to be one step behind the latest crisis, and their citizens and environments will suffer as a result. Instead, we must look for how we can *reinvent* it, restoring and even expanding its potential to provide a well-considered, sustainable, and bold vision for the future of California's cities and counties. The General Plan can restore its once-vaulted status. To this end, the California Planning Roundtable, an organization of prominent California planners from the public, private, and academic sectors, has undertaken an ambitious and interactive project called Reinventing the General Plan.

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THE ONTARIO PLAN  
A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

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## VISION

The Vision describes the future community of Ontario. Its basic purpose is to improve the quality of life for the people of Ontario and provides the policy foundation for everything the City does.

Welcome to THE ONTARIO PLAN !!!

The Ontario Plan is a dynamic Framework for sustained, comprehensive leadership in building our community. It integrates components of city governance that are typically disconnected. The Plan states community direction at a point in time (2009) and integrates it into a single guidance system that will shape the Ontario community 20 years or more into the future. The Ontario Plan provides for lasting policies to accommodate change. It consists of a six part Component Framework: 1) Vision, 2) Governance Manual, 3) Policy Plan, 4) City Council Priorities, 5) Implementation, and 6) Tracking and Feedback.

At a public hearing held on Wednesday January 27, 2010, the Ontario City Council unanimously approved The Ontario Plan Component Framework, and approved the completed Vision, Governance Manual and Policy Plan (General Plan). Two additional components, Implementation and Tracking and Feedback, will be considered for adoption by the City Council once completed. The City Council Priorities were adopted in February 2009.

We hope you enjoy The Ontario Plan; its content, its easily accessible information, photographs, and more. There is a wealth of information about Ontario and its future contained here for you to peruse. It is an incredibly transparent guidance system for the benefit of everyone, including City Council members, commissioners, staff, business community, and the public. If you have questions or want to comment on TOP please use the "Contact" button at the top of this page. Enjoy !!!

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## Ontario Plan Website

The project begins by highlighting the great things that some communities, urban and rural, are already doing with their General Plans, on an online “incubator,” at [www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org](http://www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org). It is called an incubator because it is meant to catalyze innovative thinking for communities’ staff, leaders, and members of the public. Can planners develop better ways of engaging with the public, of ensuring their General Plans stay relevant to the day-to-day decisions of the community, of pursuing paths of change that protect and enhance a community’s uniqueness while improving its services and expanding its economy? The answer provided by the models on the incubator is a resounding “yes.” A great deal is already possible under current General Plan policy and law, but many planners need inspiration to realize what they can do. The

incubator does just that, providing a platform not just to learn *about* excellent General Plans, but to learn *from* them.

For example, the City of Sacramento, sometimes viewed as a sleepy river town that happens to also be the state capital, is pursuing a vision of future change intended to make it “the most livable city in the United States,” with vibrant neighborhoods and corridors that address the challenges of climate change and regional growth while creating a more equitable, safe city for its residents. Nearby, in the Sierra Nevada, the Town of Truckee undertook a significant process of discussing with residents what makes their community special, and how those qualities could be protected while also accommodating new development and economic expansion. Notably, the Town made an effort to

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include typically underserved populations in the discussion as well. As a result, the Town's plan achieved a considerable level of "buy-in" from residents, leaders, and staff, and was adopted with remarkably little controversy despite electoral and staffing changes. In the Bay Area, Marin County identified ambitious goals for reducing carbon emissions, and created an online system that tracks specific benchmarks that will improve the suburban county's sustainability. Meanwhile, in southern California, the City of Ontario has created a General Plan that is directly linked to the day-to-day decisions and actions of all city staff, with an online format that improves accessibility and holds leaders accountable to the plan's policies. And the City of San Diego has reversed decades of spatial expansion by developing principles for a "City of Villages" that would protect fragile canyons and mesas while improving the city's overall livability.

By utilizing the power of the Internet, CPR hopes to have the models be more than a stale packet of Best Practices. CPR does not intend for the incubator to evaluate or endorse every aspect of the Plans highlighted. True to its purpose, the incubator focuses on the most innovative, replicable, and truly transformative features of the model Plans in a user-friendly, readable format. The use of "tabs" allows readers to quickly see the three to five 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. Community planners and leaders are also given the opportunity to reflect clearly about the challenges and lessons they learned from their process, with the hope of guiding others who seek to replicate their examples in their own communities.

The incubator is not a static document. The number of models will continue to grow over time, with their geographic and topical reach spreading broadly. Furthermore, although the models have been created and peer-reviewed by CPR members, the Reinventing the General Plan conversation is emphatically meant to be *two-way*. CPR wants to hear from the professionals, elected leaders, and public stakeholders who have experiences with creating, updating, or implementing General Plans and other planning documents, whether their experiences have been positive or frustrating. Have an idea for a great model that CPR should be investigating? How about an opinion about a characteristic that a "reinvented" General Plan should possess? The project's blog, at [www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org/Blog/](http://www.ReinventingTheGeneralPlan.org/Blog/), is intended to spark conversation and make sure many voices are heard.

Some major lessons are already emerging from CPR's work, which give us some sense of the principles of a truly "reinvented"

General Plan. General Plans will need to contain inclusive visions that capture both the long-range changes and day-to-day activities of the communities they serve. They will need to assess and respond to challenges and opportunities on several scales, from the neighborhood to the region, state, and beyond, in an efficient way that saves costs and time. Planners will need to engage in new ways with an expanded set of stakeholders and partners, and do so with methods and strategies that respect the unique traits of their communities. Finally, the General Plan will need to focus on placemaking in a way that goes beyond aesthetics, to create complete communities and regions in which residents, businesses, and the environment can all thrive.

The 1970s marked the first great planning revolution in California, with the creation of the state's mandates for General Plans and the passage of NEPA, CEQA, and other landmark environmental legislation. The passage of AB 32 and SB 375, the recession and its fallout, and the state's changing demographics are triggering a second great revolution for the coming decades. It is possible that a Reinvented General Plan will require very different strategies and tools for communities to use, and it may indeed look very different as well. Reinventing the California General Plan will have significant implications for long-range planning and governance throughout the nation, as planning professionals and leaders look once again to the example set by the Golden State. Ultimately, both human and ecological communities could benefit, as clearer, more secure visions for change and enhancement ensure policies that provide for a holistic, integrated society.