

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

Blueprint for a Sustainable Bay Area submitted by Urban Ecology, Oakland [EDRA / Places Awards - Research]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/85q2w7jt>

Journal

Places, 12(1)

ISSN

0731-0455

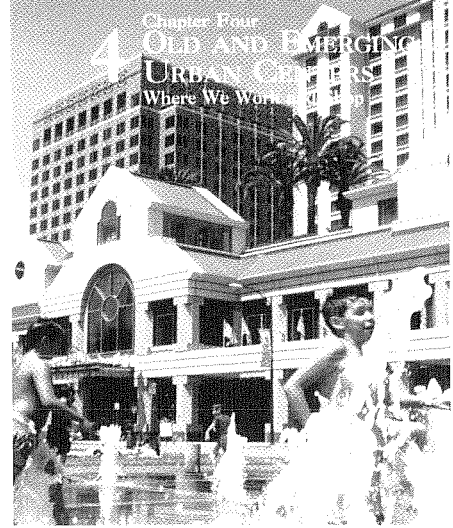
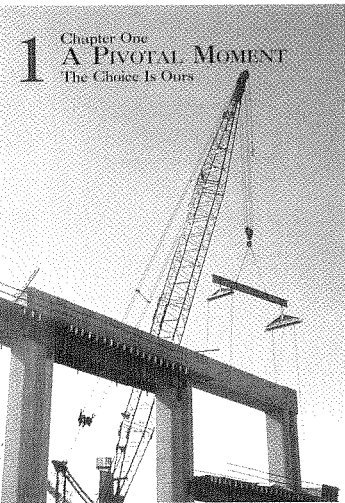
Author

Gonzalez, Robert A

Publication Date

1998-10-01

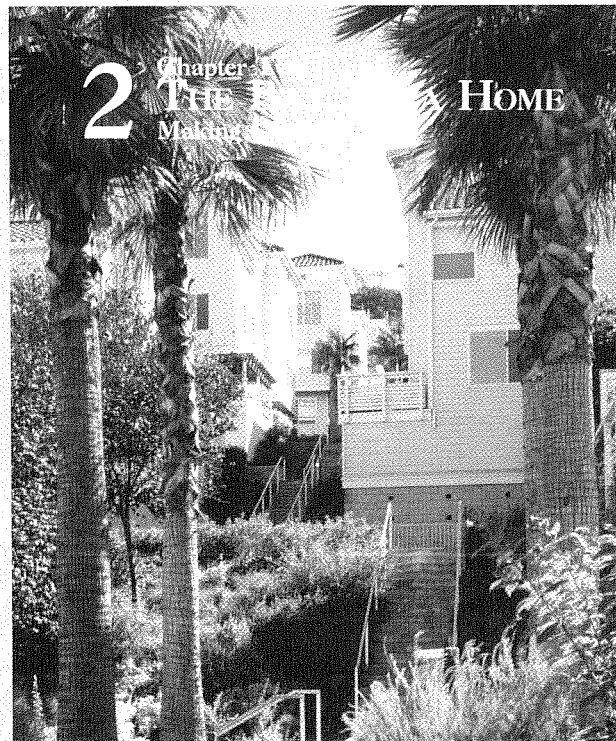
Peer reviewed



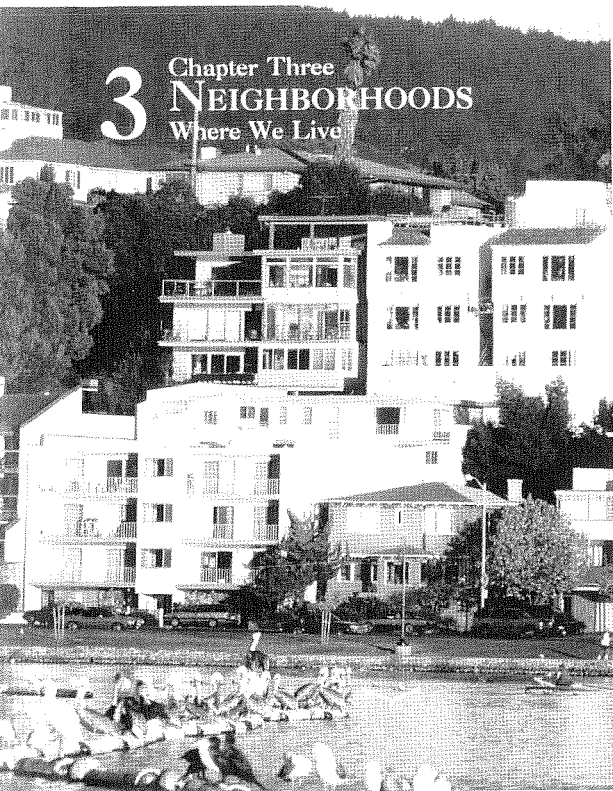
Blueprint

for a Sustainable Bay Area

Submitted by Urban Ecology, Oakland



The San Francisco Bay Area, long blessed with beauty, diversity of climate, and a colorful culture and history, is at a pivotal point. Because of past patterns of planning and development, the region is losing the special qualities that have made it a desirable place to live and work.



Urban Ecology, a Bay Area environmental advocacy group formed in 1975, has played a significant role in maintaining a green dialogue by forwarding positive steps to follow through literature, conferences and community participation. Its most recent project, a book called *Blueprint for a Sustainable Bay Area*, stands out as one of the most attractive and user-friendly compendia of research and guidelines meant to help nurture a region's ecological heritage.

Blueprint was released in December, 1996. It covers human interaction with the physical environment on four different levels: the home, neighborhoods, cities and the region. The topics concerned at each level are: the greenbelt, bay and estuary; jobs and industry; transportation and land use; materials, water and energy conservation; and regional planning and revenue sharing. The final chapter outlines appropriate roles for various participants and useful tools to use to reach the goals. Each chapter contains recommendations for action and illustrated case studies that are positive examples of local communities and

Chapter Five
THE REGION
A Look at the Big Picture



organizations that are taking steps to move towards long-term sustainability.

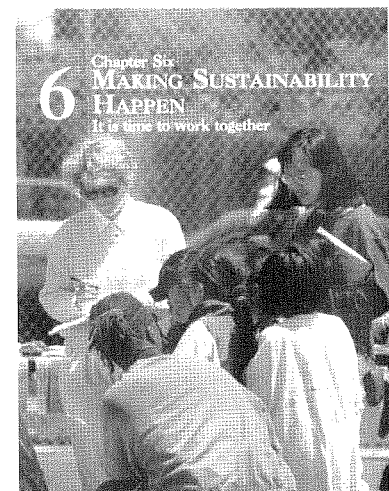
The process of defining the issues, debating solutions and writing the book was highly collaborative. Urban Ecology reached out to many community-based and environmental organizations; representatives of local, regional, state and federal government; and the business and academic communities. During 1995, ten vision forums were organized around the main topics of the book. At the forums, advisors with a range of expertise provided the conceptual framework during morning panel discussions. Afternoon events included bus and walking tours and planning workshops. More than three hundred people participated, including forty advisors.

The book was written by a team of nine within Urban Ecology. Book drafts were reviewed by the advisors, professional writers, and members of a citizen focus group. The focus group met four times, and each time the group was given exercises that stimulated discussion. The process resulted in some interesting lessons: for example, the group sent a clear message that the book needed to find a compelling alternative to the American Dream of a single-family detached home in the car-dependent suburbs, before they would be willing to move. On the other hand, after doing an exercise in which group members recorded the number of amenities in their urban neighborhoods within a quarter mile radius (such as grocery store, park, school, etc.), they realized that most of their daily needs could be met by walking instead of driving.

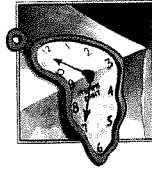
Blueprint's attractive graphics and a conscientious tenor assure that the many layers of information packed in the book remain navigable and quite a plea-

Blueprint covers sustainability at four different levels. Chapters 2-5 address different scales of living in the Bay Area—in the home, in residential neighborhoods, in a variety of urban centers and in the region as a whole. Chapter 6 outlines appropriate roles to take and useful tools to help reach targeted goals.

Graphics: Urban Ecology



Contents



Chapter One A PIVOTAL MOMENT: The Choice is Ours

page 8

The Bay Area would benefit from reconsidering a business-as-usual approach. Will we adjust our course and head in a sustainable direction or continue to allow detrimental patterns of development?

The Bay Area: What's In a Name?	10
The Challenge	12
Why A Blueprint?	14
Seven Principles of Sustainable Development	16



Chapter Two THE BAY AREA HOME: Making Choices

page 18

How can housing that is comfortable, attractive, affordable, and efficient be built to match the needs of our diverse population and life styles?

Making Housing More Affordable	20
Matching Homes and People	24
Sustainable Design	26
Sustaining Landscapes	28



Chapter Three NEIGHBORHOODS: Where We Live

page 30

The Bay Area has it all when it comes to having choice in neighborhoods. What steps can we take to make the places we live function well as communities, with a diversity of friendly neighbors and the necessities we require in our daily lives?

Common Threads Tie Us Together	32
City Neighborhoods	36
Inner Suburban Neighborhoods	40
Neighborhoods in the Greenbelt	44

Graphics: Urban Ecology

sure to read, a quality that many of the other research entries that presented in-depth and meaningful research simply lacked. The use of graphs, images, diagrams, and fact boxes also make the book accessible, and the extensive glossary of terminology and bibliography at the end is equally helpful.

Blueprint is an exercise in participatory reading; it urges readers to take action. How-to-lists and checklists provide intermittent points of assessment for the reader. Each chapter is filled with recommendations for action, a capstone that could accompany any research project that includes empirical findings and criticisms. For example, the concluding chapter outlines the appropriate roles that various participants can take, and the useful tools needed to reach identified goals. Here, the tried and true methods gleaned from community participation meetings are offered for the taking — photographs of community participants in town meetings are juxtaposed with examples of the environmental report cards produced at these meetings. Meanwhile, other illustrations of case studies reaffirm that positive steps taken by local communities and organizations can have enriching end results.

Readers, of course, are encouraged to interact at every scale, but this method leaves the possibility open for concerted efforts to be aimed at specific areas: you can concentrate on advocacy in your home, and if you want, you can get involved at the city scale. At least at the level of awareness-building, this method helps clarify the map — it deciphers how different layers of infrastructure work and influence each other.

Finally, *Blueprint* is an example of the transformation from research document to paradigm. Although the kernel of the idea for *Blueprint* was to create a comprehensive regional plan to redirect the Bay Area's development course, the book has had far-reaching results. *Blueprint* has become a resource of note throughout the country and has won awards from several national professional associations.

Robert A. Gonzalez

Jury Comments

Donlyn Lyndon: *Blueprint* is an assessment of where people are, and a projection of what kind of things need to be done. It is an interesting example of combining the research and the participation process. A lot of things we received in this category have to do with public outreach. This submission doesn't aim for public outreach with images of what you might have, which is what planning is often doing; instead, it presents an assessment of what is out there. It presents a projection of what kinds of things you ought to be paying attention to.

Claire Cooper Marcus: I think it's a wonderful model for other cities and metropolitan areas, in terms of its method, its focus group, and input from the many areas and groups. It is a handsome production that is accessible by professionals and the general public.

Lyndon: Also, it is a very good example of taking in a lot of input, information and jurisdictions, and making

Chapter Four
**OLD AND EMERGING URBAN CENTERS:
 Where We Work and Shop**

page 48

We know that downtowns, industrial centers, and newer sprawling centers are places to do business as well as be entertained, governed, and educated. But how can we realize their potential to be places that can add significantly to the joy of living as well?

Where People and Activity Mingle	50
Big City Downtowns	52
Small City Downtowns	56
Industrial Districts	60
Pseudo Centers	64

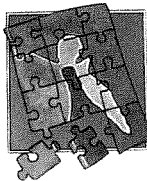


Chapter Five
**THE REGION:
 A Look at the Big Picture**

page 68

A unified view and approach to planning for the Bay Area as a region can go a long way toward making our biggest problems seem manageable.

Recognizing the Region	70
Greenspaces, Bay, and Estuary	72
Transportation and Land Use	82
Jobs and Industry	94
The Use of Materials, Water, and Energy	100
Who Pays, Who Decides?	110

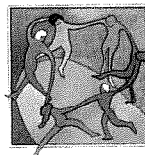


Chapter Six
**MAKING SUSTAINABILITY HAPPEN:
 It is Time to Work Together**

page 114

Everyone has a role to play in making a sustainable Bay Area a conceivable reality. By becoming more involved in public decision making and encouraging our neighbors to do the same, we can take active responsibility for and be involved firsthand in improving our own futures and that of the region as a whole.

Thinking and Acting Sustainably	116
Planning Together	120
What's Next	124



Glossary

page 126

Resources

page 128

- Selected Bibliography
- Organizations
- Case Studies
- Acknowledgments
- Photo Credits
- Index

a way of thinking about how they can all operate to each other's benefit. It then puts that information into a form that is very accessible for people to understand, specifically what the key issues are and some of the actions that might be taken.

Gary Hack: This reminds me of the first regional plan for New York, which was also, in its time, a chance to commission research and pull together materials. It served as a great moment when ideas were synthesized for New York City. In a way, *Blueprint* could have the same impact, which is to rally people around the region, around a set of ideas, and get them accepted and serve as a guide. In the American scene, where we have no significant regional planning organization that can manage to pull the power of ideas and logic together, this is about the best we could hope for to shape the sense of the region.

Samina Quraeshi: This is a very useful document for community building, and for similar projects of that scale. This is trying to unify or offer unifying principles to a very important, quite large, very diverse area.

Lawrence Halprin: This is a thing that has been going on in the Bay Area for perhaps 40 years, where the interior of the Bay was saved by the Bay Coastal

Development Commission from becoming a river. Then beginning the ring of transit that is going all around, the BART. It's one of the great planning adventures of anywhere, I think — this saving. *Blueprints* demonstrates what many of us have been attempting to do on an on-going basis over time.

Marcus: The authors of this were not a large government funded organization, or even the Association of Bay Area Governments. It's a small, watch-dog, largely volunteer, group of people.

Hack: In that sense, it is similar to the Regional Plan Association in New York. And there are other examples around the country of organizations looking for models like this.

Halprin: It should be said that this is driving most developers crazy, and making for many people a claim that the Bay Area is where development is extremely restrictive, very expensive, forcing development not do all the things it wants to do. It is an important idea for that very reason. It doesn't come cheap, is what I'm saying.