



Is Smart Growth Really Smart and for Whom? A Forum: What is Healthy Transit Oriented Development?

ABOUT

On June 15, 2011, professionals from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, San Francisco Department of Public Health, Transform, The Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California, City of Oakland Planning Department, Alameda County of Public Health, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, Pacific Institute, and others engaged in discussions about the technical issues involved in planning transit oriented development and the public health and equity implications for environmental justice communities. This forum served as a model for similar discussions to support communities that have begun to incorporate public health considerations into their Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) planning processes.

PANELISTS

For a video recording of each presentation, see the RAMP website at www.rampasthma.org.

- Public Health – Tom Rivard, Manager, Health Hazard Assessment Group, San Francisco Department of Public Health
 - Affordable Housing Developer – Evelyn Stivers, Field Director, The Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California
 - CEQA Guidelines – Dave Vintze, Air Quality Planning Manager, Bay Area Air Quality Management District
 - Environmental Justice – Margaret Gordon, Co-Director, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project
 - Transportation Synopsis – Stuart Cohen, Executive Director, TransForm
 - Community Mapping – Catalina Garzon, Co-Director of the Communities Strategies, Pacific Institute
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DISCUSSION NOTES

After the panelists gave their presentations and answered questions from the audience, participants then broke into small discussion groups. Each group was tasked with answering a challenging question designed to get at the heart of some of the public health and environmental justice concerns related to transit oriented development. What follows are the notes from each of the discussion groups.

QUESTION: What is your vision of healthy smart growth? That is, the ideal policy to protect and improve community health while fostering vibrant walkable, bike-able and transit-friendly neighborhoods.

RESPONSE:

- Community of color
 - o Policies that prevent displacement.
 - o Incentives – safety, education, quality of life, attract housing

- Mixed affordability/mixed income
- Airtight buildings
- Good location
 - Not too close to freeways, distance and space from other hazards
 - Resources in walking distance
 - Close to transportation
- Safe environments: pedestrian, low violence, more people out of their houses – community
- Decent air quality
- Low noise levels
- Easy access to shopping
- Building around existing resources – create neighborhood vibe
- Model after vibrant, healthy communities
 - Mixed housing styles
 - High density
 - Common ground/shared space that is open to everyone (i.e. Lake Merritt)
 - Mixed income example – Montgomery County, MD
 - Community engagement – bring diverse stakeholders to the table in forming policy – frame around their interests and incentives.

QUESTION: How do we make smart growth protect community fabric? Race, class, family, vibrancy, integrity.

RESPONSE:

- Race: acknowledge it is a piece of the problem.
- Safe routes to schools invested by state but do not look at reality (community expertise here).
- The issue we haven't touched on is housing shortage and increasing prices.
- Public housing has not been part of this discussion.
- Planners are problem legally binding agents to protect community fabric – community benefits agreements.
- People who live there be part of. Make people stay, businesses stay. Three regional high schools.
- Understand political legacy and systematic pushing out of communities of color to make room for re-integration of whites. Jobs, education, transportation, disconnected silos, inter-agency processes.
- Change in how plans are made. Inclusion in beginning. Organizing voices with bureaucratic processes. Tail end of planning – want investment. Want gentrification to be reframed so people are not pushed out.
- Solution: Meaningful community inclusion in coordinate planning process resources into community.
- Learn from good examples of community inclusion – in Brazil, Quebec, and Italy.

QUESTION: Is smart growth really smart and for whom?

RESPONSE:

- Smart growth:
 - Must be holistic with community input.
 - Is planning for people and pedestrians and vehicles.
 - Is a three-way dialogue between board, staff, community, academics.
 - Leads to a better environment and economy.
- How to make smart growth smarter?
 - Leadership from low-income people of color and vulnerable people.
 - Private sector and developers talking to each other.
 - Identify gaps – where communities were not involved in dialogue, just agency to agency.

- Decision-making processes must be in place (e.g. BAAQMD decisions are counter to local decision. BAAQMD does not have intervention opportunities or better local expertise (disconnect between expertise and decision-making).
- Other resources to draw from:
 - Environment justice folks added public health and equity. We need leadership to combine all.
 - Academics have information that is needed to inform the process (interaction).
- Proposal: Air quality movement has been about restrictions. How do we merge movements?
 - Highlight where we want elderly homes to go. Identify sensitive receptors (regional and local mapping)
 - Question: How to incentivize? We need to have a timely fashion to make plan.
- Solution:
 - Regional plan with mapping
 - Move from a place of saying “no” to a place of saying “yes.”
 - Housing and public health – do smarter!
 - With the participation of vulnerable populations, academics, and policy makers.

QUESTION: Infill developers have criticized that the new BAAQMD CEQA process could push development out to suburbs (and it makes infill more challenging). What can be done to remove barriers to infill, while retaining health protections?

RESPONSE:

- Affordable housing policy – place affordable units/units for sensitive populations furthest from pollution source
 - Challenge: status of families change, so need to plan for all units to be safe.
 - As part of general plan, mandate a certain percentage of affordable housing that cannot be in hot zones (distribute among units).
- Mitigation strategies such as configuring sites so units are protected (site design).
- Recommend land uses for sites that are inappropriate for residences or other sensitive sites.
- Educate development about guidelines and strategies for healthier design/mitigations.
 - Costs for analysis
 - Solution: Third party organization to do analysis for most sensitive sites.
 - Preemptive analysis of land
 - Support for doing screening and resources and tools.

QUESTION: If a high-quality transit-oriented development was location in a severe toxic hotspot (e.g. 100 feet from the 880), what would be your preferred outcome?

RESPONSE:

- Decision-Making
 - Community-based decision making, including education and leadership development.
 - Safeguard and strengthen opportunities for impacted communities to shape what healthy development looks like.
 - Communities identify impacts.
- Clean-up/Prevention
 - Education and create accountability among local governments around regional hotspots.
 - Regionally – equitable distribution of burdens and positive impacts.

QUESTION: Of all the policies around housing proximity to freeways and pollution sources (e.g. BAAQMD CEQA), what would work best at the state level?

RESPONSE:

- Health and equity metrics
 - o Whether or not existence of regional air quality protocol for analyzing health impacts near roadways and best practice mitigation plans adopted in local plans.
- Local housing elements in general plan should include health impacts of local sites to see if viable and safe
- What should state require air districts to do?
 - o High density design
 - o Building guidelines (air quality, noise, energy efficiency)
 - o Transit plans and resources for maintenances (BART expanding at expense of maintenance)
 - o Does it serve population in high density housing?
 - o Transit access (bus) – proximity verse accessibility
- Air district regulation – to control emissions from generators.
- What policies do we need?
 - o Stronger role for BAAQMD – make clean air a priority for site development.
 - o Learn from SACOG process – good example for risk analysis.
 - o CDPH – HIAP – statewide guidance on health risk analysis and mitigation best practices – buffer 500 feet or 1000 feet?

SPONSORS: Regional Asthma Management and Prevention; Social Equity Caucus; Pacific Institute, Ditching Dirty Diesel Collaborative.

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