

VISIONING FOR LAND USE – A STUDY OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PROCESS OF LAND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Effective vision statements elevate and compel action because they are inspirational and achievable.

Nowhere in the world have Common Interest Developments (CID) “been more successfully used, or unsparingly applied, than in America”, Gordon notes in *Planned Developments in California*. The evolution of such developments can be traced from Ebenezer Howard’s ‘garden cities’ to the modern CID. Howard sought to combine the best aspects of city and country life in ‘new towns’ of Welwyn and Letchworth, England. Precursors to the planned developments in the US include Gramercy Park (New York), Louisburg Square (Boston) and South Park (San Francisco). During the 1920s the idea of the ‘garden city’ was revived with the new town of Radburn (New Jersey).

The popularity of CIDs heightened during the post-World War II housing boom and rise of “community builders” who favored large-scale, dense forms of development. This was encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration in the 1960 by publishing guidelines for condominiums and planned developments to obtain mortgage insurance. This period of growth culminated in the emergence of large-scale master planned communities such as Irvine, California and Reston, Virginia.

Where the late 1960s and 1970s there came a series of reforms to developments, with support from the Urban Land Institute and National Association of Home Builders, the fiscal strains of the 1970s and 1980s lead to local governments further promoting CIDs as a means of offsetting the service and infrastructure costs of new development.

With the ever-increasing trend of local governments transferring the responsibility of development onto private developers, though not without public review, it is imperative that each individual development resulting be ensured to comply with a defined and effective vision for the larger region, of which each development is an integral part. However, small or large a development, it most definitely has a ripple effect in its surrounding areas, affecting the social, economic and environmental aspect and sustainability of it.

“Growth comes in increments that, taken separately, doesn’t seem like much: another few unsewered residential lots here, a new strip mall there, a wider road to accommodate the traffic. Added together, however, they amount to a land use planning disaster”, Mike Ivey

This paper aims at discussing the processes that are employed by public and private players in California, through the example of the Sacramento region, that are rooted in the establishment of a visioning procedure. Through the discussion at various levels of planning it demonstrates the effectiveness of Visioning for Strategic Land Use projects which in turn ensures permanence and the emergence of a culture and way of life.

1. Planning at the Regional Scale

1.1. Sacramento – creating a vision for the larger region

Quality of life concerns are driving communities throughout the State of California and the nation to make growing smarter a top priority. Nowhere is this mission assumed more urgency than in the six-county Sacramento Region, which is experiencing the fastest growth in the State and the country in the past decade. The region's political leaders are working together under the umbrella of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) to address the concerns through the Sacramento Region Blueprint. The Blueprint, which has developed in the form of a Land Use and Transportation study, has been done so through an extensive public participation process and represents collective vision of the people of the area. While the Blueprint seeks to create a vision for land use at the macro scale, its underlying principles are those that can and should be implemented in a development of any and every scale. These principles and how they translate to a richer quality of life, are discussed below.

1.1.1. Smart Growth Principles

The concept of Smart Growth, which is expressed through various different terminologies in the planning profession; Good Growth; Sustainable Development being some of them, is driven by a single over-arching goal; *to preserve and enhance the quality of life for the region's citizens.*

Good growth does this by promoting a sense of community in new and expanding areas while protecting the integrity and vitality of existing communities – thereby strengthening the region as a whole. The fundamental principles of such a 'smart' or 'sustainable' growth are;

- Provide a variety of **transportation choices**

Community design can help encourage people to walk, ride bicycles; bus; light rail; train or car pool. Streets can be designed to include dedicated bike lanes or special lanes for bus rapid transit. Community design can encourage people to make more trips closer to home, make walking or biking easier, consequently reducing congestion and air pollution.

- Offer **housing choices** and opportunities

Providing a variety of places where people can live – apartments, condominiums, townhouses and single-family detached homes- creates opportunities for a variety of people – families, singles, seniors and people with special needs. This issue is of special concern for the very-low, low and moderate income groups for whom finding housing, especially close to work is a challenge.

- Take advantage of **compact development**

Creating environments that are more compactly built and use space in an efficient but more aesthetic manner can encourage more walking, biking, and public transit use.

- Use **existing assets**

Focusing development in communities with vacant land or intensifying development of underutilized land can make better use of public infrastructure, including roads. Building on existing assets can also mean refurbishing historic buildings or clustering buildings more densely in suburban office parks.

- **Mixed Land uses**

Building homes together with small businesses or even light industry is called "mixed-use" development, and it has proven to create active, vital neighborhoods. Examples of such a development may be; housing projects near an employment

center; a small shopping center near houses; or a high-rise building with ground floor retail and apartments or condominiums upstairs. Mixed-use development near transit can boost ridership.

- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty through **natural resources conservation**

Quality of life is better when we have clean air to breathe and water to drink, and can experience the outdoors – in parks and greenbelts or in natural places. To ensure healthy and attractive natural environments, we must maintain our open space and conserve the most productive farmland. Community design can help accomplish this by encouraging energy efficient design, water conservation and storm water management, and the planting of shade trees to reduce ground temperatures in the summer.

- Encourage distinctive, attractive communities with **quality design**

How projects are developed, how they are oriented in relationship to the street, how well designed their facades are, if they have setbacks and where their garages are placed, all contribute to a community's attractiveness. This also influences how much people like to walk or bike and contributes to community pride and sense of ownership.

1.2. Public Processes in Planning

1.2.1. The Blueprint Project

The Blueprint project was initiated by the SACOG Board of Directors after it viewed regional computer modeling results that demonstrated how current growth patterns and transportation investment priorities would result in significant increases in congestion in the future. The Blueprint project is bringing together several stakeholders in a first-ever attempt to guide how the region grows over the next 50 years. Stakeholders are defined as all groups that may influence or be affected by the region's growth patterns and include the following groups;

- Local Officials
- Civic Groups
- Environmental Advocates
- the Development Community
- Business Leaders and,
- The Public

Seeking broad input from the ground up, SACOG launched a series of 37 workshops in neighborhoods, cities and counties throughout the region including two Regional Forums. At the conclusion of these workshops and forums, 5000 participants had used the project's software to study how the region might look under different land use scenarios.

Input from the workshops was used to develop four distinct growth scenarios for further study. These scenarios included a scenario which showed how the region would shape if the existing growth patterns were to continue without intervention; termed 'Base Case' scenario. In a preference study with public participants, an overwhelming rejection to the Base Case scenario was recorded, in favor of alternatives that provided for;

- greater range of **Housing Choices**
- **Reinvestment** of already developed areas
- closer integration of **Jobs and Housing**

A regional Summit, conducted to regroup City and County elected officials of the region, discussed the development and result of a *'Draft Preferred Blueprint Scenario'*.

An approval of the Preferred Blueprint Scenario was granted by the SACOG Board of Directors which culminated a three year effort to engage the public and local government leaders in crafting a vision for the future growth of the Sacramento Region. The approval of the Blueprint as a voluntary ideology or framework for future growth in the region is the beginning of a new shape to communities as they grow and thrive in a social and healthy economic environment.

Moving forward, the applicability of the Blueprint project depends heavily on the use of data, analyses and growth concepts by the various planning agencies to shape their communities. For this purpose, the next steps outlined by SACOG include several actions for working with cities and counties to achieve results relevant to their context and land use issues.

- 1.2.1.1. Maintain and enhance the regional database, research and modeling tools and make them available for use on an on-going basis
- 1.2.1.2. Implement the Community Design program in order to provide incentives for capital and planning projects that are consistent with the Blueprint
- 1.2.1.3. Provide technical assistance to local governments and the development community to develop plans and design projects that are consistent with Blueprint
- 1.2.1.4. Develop a tool box of Best Planning practices that are consistent with the Blueprint;
 - Model Codes
 - Principles to promote neighborhood liveability
 - Street design guidelines
 - Model education and,
 - Citizen Involvement practices
- 1.2.1.5. Track and publicize local planning and development actions and consider implementing a Blueprint certification system
- 1.2.1.6. Prepare a 2030 growth forecast and land use allocation that represents the best estimate of the most likely development pattern to occur
- 1.2.1.7. Develop and implement a benchmarking system to occur on a regular basis to track the extent to which the region is growing
- 1.2.1.8. Conduct a study of other actions that could be taken to reduce barriers and take advantage of opportunities
- 1.2.1.9. Update the Blueprint Conceptual Map and Growth Principles regularly to include new and better information and knowledge

1.2.2. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is a 28 year plan for transportation improvements in the six-county region based on projections for growth in population, housing and jobs. The MTP is key to the quality of life and economic health of the region. SACOG is the Metropolitan Planning Organization responsible for developing the state and federally required MTP every four years in coordination with 22 cities and 6 counties in the greater Sacramento region.

Federal law requires the MTP to conform to air quality goals for the region, satisfy financial constraints such that all proposed projects can be reasonably funded, and undergo extensive public review. State law further requires the MTP process to include careful environmental analysis and review. The MTP 2035 will be the first MTP for the Sacramento region to pro-actively link land-use, air quality, and transportation needs. Development of the

MTP provides an 18 month public priority setting process to identify a list of transportation improvement projects to best meet the needs of the region.

1.2.3. Impact of the Blueprint on processes.

Each time SACOG adopts an MTP, it must first adopt a 25-year growth forecast for the region, and a land use allocation that specifies its best estimate of the most likely places where that growth will occur in each city and county in the next 25 years. While the same process applies to the next comprehensive MTP update, a more explicit process needs to be introduced to consider future land use patterns as the result of the Blueprint Map and Growth principles. This is of urgent importance since the Blueprint project research demonstrates that changes to land use patterns can achieve significant benefits to the region's transportation system and air quality.

In order to create the 2030 land use map for the MTP update, SACOG prescribed each local government to develop an individual strategy to determine how it planned to pursue actions that will aid in the achievement of the planning principles in the Blueprint scenario. Each jurisdiction is asked to pass a resolution in support of the growth allocation and an accompanying 2030 map for their jurisdiction that will reflect its needs and interests. Examples of actions that may be included are ;

- Adoption of guidelines that could be used to consider Blueprint principles in a variety of local planning decisions;
- Changes to decision making procedures;
- Consideration of General Plan and implementing code amendments;
- Identifying opportunities to encourage reinvestment;
- Using the database and modeling tools in community planning processes.

1.3. The Local Context

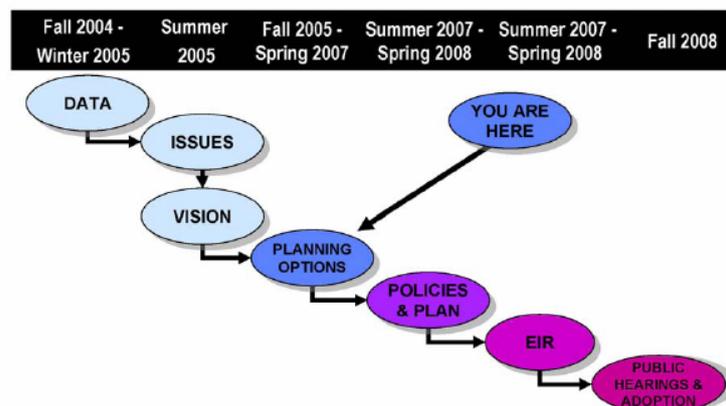
1.3.1. Adoption of Vision plans

1.3.1.1. City of Sacramento

The Long Range Planning Staff at the City of Sacramento, subsequent to the Blueprint Plan, was directed by the City Council to prepare a Draft Preferred Land Use Alternative for its 2030 General Plan. This was based on a City Leadership Workshop and the planning team's Recommended Preferred Growth Concept presented to the City Council. With this direction, planning team prepared a report in May 2007 consistent with the City's overall Strategic Plan goal and the General Plan vision of becoming "The Most Livable City in America". In addition the report was prepared consistent with;

- The Smart Growth Principles adopted by Council in 2001,
- the Preferred Blueprint adopted for the region by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) in 2004, and
- The Vision and Guiding Principles adopted by Council in 2005.

The background for the 2030 General Plan included the gathering background data and information, obtaining public input, defining the Vision and Guiding Principles, and mapping options for future growth and development of the City. The figure below shows the process upto the stage of the Planning report, as well as future tasks.



Source: City of Sacramento, General Plan-Preferred Land Use Alternative

Figure 1: 2030 General Plan Process Outline

Since the Blueprint Strategy identified a need to accommodate growth within the borders of existing cities and immediate adjacent areas, rather than continuing sprawl outwards into agricultural lands and open spaces in the six-county region, the data gathering included a population growth forecast concluding that over 200,000 additional residents and 140,000 jobs are likely to be added to the city by 2030. In planning to accommodate this significant growth, as a first step, areas where the growth and change might occur were identified along with areas where no change may occur. Public input in Town Hall forums was gathered to define opportunities and constraints existing in various neighborhoods and districts throughout the city.

Based on these findings, three types of “Opportunity Areas” that could accommodate significant growth by 2030 were identified;

- **Greenfields:** New growth areas that currently contain little or no development that are adjacent to the city’s edges
- **Major Infill Areas:** Areas with the most potential for new infill development or reuse and intensification based on their location, function and potential market demands
- **Underutilized and Reclaimed Lands:** Areas throughout the city in which there are large tracts of vacant, underutilized or reclaimed land, or areas with high concentrations of parcels likely to be redeveloped

Draft growth scenarios were developed on the above, where Scenario 1, much like the Blueprint Base Case, assumed that the city continues to grow under existing General Plan which will not accommodate the projected growth and in addition, will not be compliant with the Blueprint, Visioning & Guiding Principles and, Smart Growth principles. The alternative scenarios included;

- **Scenario 2:** Projected growth would be accommodated in both Major Infill Areas and some New Growth areas, resulting in a more compact footprint than scenario 3
- **Scenario 3:** Projected growth would be accommodated in Major Infill Areas but even more so in all New Growth Areas identified, resulting in a significantly larger urban footprint than scenario 2.

A second phase of Town Hall forums presented the above scenarios for public review, which also included an identification of issues and implications associated with each scenario.

Through the exercise was developed a Draft Preferred Land Use Alternative to the existing General Plan for the City of Sacramento to achieve its goal of becoming “The Most Livable

City in America” based on key vision and guiding principles and the foreseen benefits include;

- Vibrant Downtown and Town Centers
- Energized Commercial Corridors
- Expanded Transportation Choices
- Safe and Livable Neighborhoods
- Sustainable Development

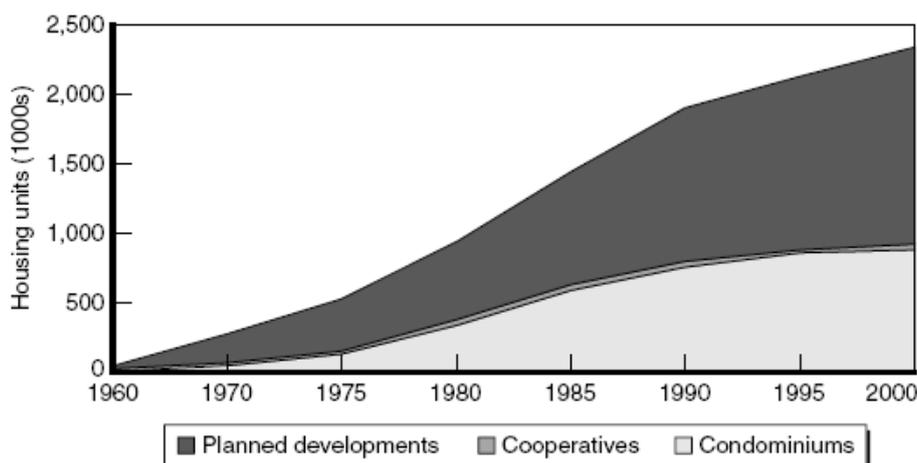
The Draft Preferred Land Use Alternative will allow for:

- Flexible/Mixed Land Use
- Urban Development Standards
- Broad Range of Densities
- Streamlined Review
- Community Form/Design Identified
- Internal Consistency
- Ease of Update
- Implementation Plan
- Initial CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) Clearance

2. Visioning at Micro-scale

2.1. Private Developments

Gordon observes that nearly 3 million California homes, one quarter of the state housing stock, are located within common interest developments (Gordon, Tracy M. (2004) “Planned Developments in California: Private Communities and Public Life”). Following an ever-increasing trend, CIDs constituted 60 percent of residential construction during the 1990s where planned developments formed more than 40 percent of these developments. More than pattern of residential development, CIDs are observed by Gordon to be an emerging form of privatization. The growth of the so-called private governments that are created by this sort of privatization has generated debate around the adverse consequences generated for non-residents, and primary among these feared outcomes is heightened racial and economic segregation and diminished civic engagement.



Source:HOA-Info (2002)

Figure 2: - Growth of Common Interest Developments in California

Further Gordon notes that planned developments still represent a relatively small proportion of the population overall, however, as their numbers increase, their effects on the neighborhood composition and civic engagement may become more pronounced. While these concerns are recognized and addressed, to a large degree, in the public review and approval process (city or county), the responsibility lies on the private land developers and

planners to observe a good land ethic while planning such developments ensuring their integration into the overall community, such that they are inclusive, as opposed to exclusive, developments with a high regard for the impact these developments may have on the socio-economic fabric of the city or neighborhood.

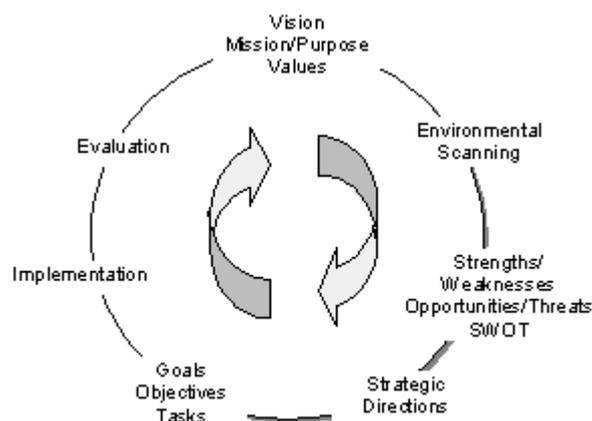
2.2. Private Sector Planning and Development

The creation of a 'project' in a broad sense invariably comprises of a linear process. While the order of steps taken might vary or, in some cases, skip or add steps depending on the scope of a project, the process usually begins at visualizing an idea in a statement or in the form of a concept diagram. This marks the primary objective and underlying principle for realizing the 'project' which is then put through a process of detailing in various consecutive stages. Once detailed to the desired degree, the project gains its final shape and is then setup with a framework for implementation.

While the above description applies to any task or project, it is also directly applicable to the land development process as undertaken by private sector developers and planners in California and is discussed through its various steps below.

This process, in concept, is directly comparable to the Public process discussed in Chapter 1, however private development processes, in most cases, start where the public processes end. Thus while visioning of the larger context by the public sector lays the groundwork by which individual developments are reviewed, the quality and intent of each individual development essentially effects the quality of the fabric that is created when each one of these developments is put together in community to form a whole.

2.2.1. Visioning to Implementation



Source: Vision and Strategic Planning, NACM (2007)

Strategic planning, which usually includes a visioning component, is an ongoing, systematic process to critically and creatively:

- Assess current situation
- Define a desired future
- Develop comprehensive strategies to move in the desired direction

Strategic planning includes:

- defining a project's mission and values;
- trends analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis;
- identifying strategic issues;
- long range goals;
- objectives;
- short term priorities.

Strategic planning and visioning, although complimentary, differ in various regards. Visioning is a creative process to articulate a preferred future. Vision statements are most effective when they tell a story of a new reality – a detailed preferred future. Effective vision statements elevate and compel action because they are both bold and inspirational and, believable and achievable.

Implementation consistent with the strategic plan rounds out the essential elements of long-range strategic planning. These steps ensure that visioning and strategic planning are more than a mere cerebral exercise. The following discussion lays out the steps that form the process of a land development in progress.

2.2.1.1. Conceptual Land Plan

Land development projects are primarily driven by the mix/type of land uses that can be accommodated on the property within the existing context. For this reason, while a design vision is integral to the process, the land use concept also forms a vision statement of the ultimate desired development scenario. The exercise includes the creation of several varying concepts in terms of land use types; transportation alternatives; public spaces; existing amenities to be preserved; environmental features; residential, commercial and industrial uses; town centers; public buildings; park and recreation corridors among others.

These land use concepts developed based on a fixed set of criteria, are then analyzed through a comparative process to arrive at a 'Preferred Land Use Plan'. Some of the decision process depends on the provision of facilities in the case of an interdependent community, while the overriding concern above all is the sustainability of the community as a whole and its interaction with either adjacent existing communities or those that may develop around the project in subsequent years.

2.2.1.2. Land Use Designations

The identification of a Preferred Land Use Plan is the beginning of defining the shape of the project and all subsequent steps serve to detail this desired outcome at various levels and to ensure the profitability of all involved stakeholders including;

- Future residents
- Residents of adjacent communities
- Public agency of the affected jurisdiction
- All users of amenities that are envisioned by the project

For this, the project then needs to be placed in a public policy framework that will further the objectives of the project and will aid in realizing the various aspects of it. As established in Chapter 1, a prospective development area is subject to the provisions of one or several public policy plans formed by the agencies pervading over the respective jurisdiction. These are based on projected plans by the city, county or state agencies and may need to be revised, in part or whole, for the realization of the project. While specific policies may differ between jurisdictions, in most contexts the policy plans that a project needs to abide by are the General Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and a Community Plan adopted by the jurisdiction.

For each aspect of the Preferred Land Use Plan to take shape, the land use types dictated by these long-range plans are amended to fit the specific configuration of the proposed plans, in accordance with the agencies vision of the overall growth of the area and the amendments are termed as;

- General Plan Amendment
- Rezone
- Community Plan Amendment

In the process of acquiring these amendments, the burden of proof is placed on the applicant (in this case private developer) to demonstrate that the proposed plans seek to achieve the overall community's goals which primarily include;

- conformance with the overall vision of the community
- provide a rich quality of life for its residents
- provide housing opportunities as required by the community in its projected growth
- create jobs for the sustainability of the community
- provide a diverse array of uses making it a multifunctional zone
- use existing resources
- protect and conserve natural resources

2.2.1.3. Visioning Document

The visioning document is employed as a tool to shape the physical form of the community and its constituent neighborhoods, the consistency of which renders it a cohesive neighborhood quality and aids in 'place-making'. The design concepts applied in this exercise ensure a visual and functional quality to the development without which it will function as isolated uses and not as parts of a whole. This design vision ensures the translation of the overall vision into the structural aspects of the development which creates the environment that contributes to a community form. The details of such a document may vary from project to project, however the following are design solutions that spell out the various aspects of each neighborhood.

- Architectural Style
- Neighborhood Entrance
- Streets
- Public Spaces
- Details
- Hardscape Palette
- Plant Palette

must also be consistent with any Airport Land Use Plan pursuant to the Public Utilities code. In turn, all subsequent subdivision and development, all public works projects and zoning regulations must be consistent with the specific plan.

The adoption of a specific plan is a legislative act similar to adoption of a general plan or zoning ordinance, however it can be initiated by any number of factors including development issues or the efforts of private property owners, elected officials, citizen groups, or the local planning agency.

Government Code mandates that a specific plan be structured as follows:

(a) A specific plan shall include a text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:

(1) The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.

(2) The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.

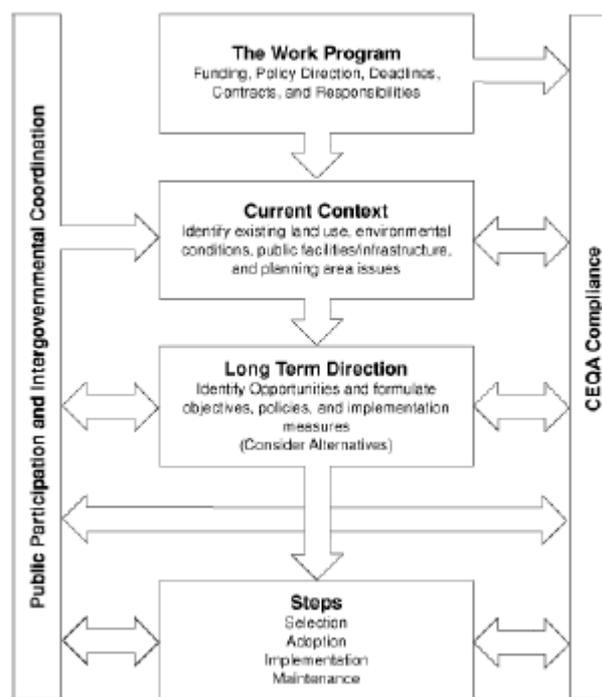
(3) Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.

(4) A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3).

(b) The specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

While state law specifies the mandatory specific plan contents pursuant to code 65451, it leaves the format to the discretion of the legislative body. The outline is an example of a statutorily complete and effective specific plan.

1. Introductory Plan Information
2. Summary
3. Introduction
4. Land Use Planning and Regulatory Provisions
5. The Infrastructure Plan
6. Program of Implementation Measure
7. Relationship of the Specific Plan's Environmental Document to subsequent Discretionary Projects
8. Specific Plan Administration
9. Specific Plan Enforcement
10. Appendices



Source: Planners Guide to Specific Plans, State of California

Figure 3: Specific Plan Process Diagram

2.2.1.5. Design Guidelines

The purpose of design guidelines is to implement planned developments and translate the Area Plans and Zoning Ordinance in the physical form. The Guidelines are intended to act as a supplement to City codes and ordinances and shall control, when more restrictive than such codes and ordinances, or when inconsistencies arise between the provisions of the guidelines. Where Design Review Committees exist, project applicants within the community area are subject to review based on the guideline document.

Guideline documents incorporate recommendations and mandates where, mandates are treated as standards with limited room for variation, whereas the recommendations are subject to some interpretation and have room for minor variations.

Contents of Design Guidelines:

- Purpose and Intent
- Development Areas
- Development Standards and Guidelines
- Streets and Circulation
- Community-wide Standards
- Landscape Standards
- Entrances and Signage

3. Conclusion

While the above discussion lays out the processes involved for visioning at various scales for development of communities, it also points out the heavy involvement of the private sector in shaping our tomorrow. The need for evolving, with rapidly changing growth scenarios, is felt now more than ever before, where population forecasts show steep increases over short periods of time. The current economic dive in the development world as

of today has placed an ever-increasing pressure of providing quality designs in a vastly competitive field where sustainability is the concern of highest urgency.

The public and private planning processes as described above, demonstrate how the process of achieving a sustainable and stable neighborhood or community effectively begins at the broadest level, the formation of the General Plan and how the public officials conceive the fabric of the area in its entirety. The realization of this vision through the details of each development that occurs subsequently is finally what puts physical form to ideas and creates that tangible factor that we refer to as a healthy living environment.

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