



CITIZENS PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
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April 18, 2008

Chair Myers and Planning Commissioners
Cc: Mayor Blum and Councilmembers, Staff

RE: Plan Santa Barbara -- *Development Trends Report (DTR)*

Appreciation

Citizens Planning Association's General Plan Update Committee congratulates staff on its excellent *Development Trends Report 1990-2007*.

Our comments below focus on three concerns about the possible continuation of current development trends into the next three decades: (a) the danger of further deterioration in our jobs/housing imbalance; (b) the uncertain cost of mitigating the predictable adverse impacts; and (c) the health effects of traffic-generated air pollution.

How much residential development and of what kind?

Our unique environment is the prime source of our economic viability. That viability is based on retirement income and tourism plus high tech industry. All three elements can go anywhere. They choose to come here, and they come for the same things Santa Barbarans love about this community: its small town feel, scenic beauty, historic character and cultural richness among other advantages. Santa Barbara continues to be in a bind that has existed for decades: the more we protect and preserve our high quality of life, the more people want to and do move here.

How much more should or can Santa Barbara develop to accommodate more residents without destroying the eminently livable environment that attracts people in the first place? The *DTR* indicates that some 6,000 additional residential units could be built in mixed use projects alone.



Developments such as Chapala One (above) are out of scale in size and bulk and do not maintain Santa Barbara's small town feel.

Since market-rate units generate need for service workers, continuation of past trends will diminish the city's historic character and quality of life without diminishing our present jobs/housing imbalance. By contrast, CPA's previously submitted policy recommendations and implementation strategies aim to reconcile our community's need for diverse housing opportunities with its long-standing commitment to preserve the established character of the city and to live within our limited resources. (See "CPA Proposed New Housing Policies for the City of Santa Barbara" under Issues and Events at citizensplanning.org)



Above is Casa de las Fuentes, a high density work force housing project which fits within the community.

What will growth cost?

Exhibit 16 of the Report offers 11 pages of "Potential Implications of Future Growth." Many are negative impacts whose mitigation would be costly. We request, therefore, that cost estimates be provided for growth-related increases in city services. The cost estimates should then be compared to the estimated growth-related increase in taxes and other revenues to fund the current per capita level of services. Armed with such information decision makers and the public could begin to consider the financial consequences of growth should current development trends continue between 2010 and 2030.

The health implications of traffic-generated air pollution

We applaud staff’s proposed addition to City Council’s nine previously adopted Sound Community Planning Principles:

Create a healthy community: City infrastructure and development shall promote a healthy and active lifestyle with transportation choices, recreational spaces, and availability of locally grown foods. (p. 5)

We caution, however, against the assumption that situating residential units in tall buildings near heavy stop-and-go city traffic is a healthy choice. Especially if no ample setbacks and other open spaces assure the efficient dissipation of traffic-generated air pollution, residential densification can indeed be dangerous to your health.

Residents of a high density area may rely on alternative modes of transportation, especially if walking and biking are safe and public transportation is convenient. But people who live and/or work in a densely populated area are also exposed to its polluted air even as they try to derive health benefits from the outdoor exercise afforded by biking or walking. While such exercise may help to diminish the health risks posed by excessive weight gain and obesity, the benefits are often coupled with the respiratory and cardiovascular harm done by air pollution.

Recent research has established clear links between heavy traffic and the health of “sensitive receptors” (e.g., children, seniors, pulmonary patients) in the population. In particular, numerous studies have demonstrated the increased probability for the occurrence of both asthma and retarded lung development in children residing near highways and city arterials. Ways must thus be found to spot check or reliably estimate the health risks associated with particular city



The Farmers Market

locations before they are approved for large-scale residential development or other sensitive land uses such as schools or senior facilities.

(For previously submitted documentation see “CPA’s Proposed Updates for the City of SB’s Conservation Element’s Air Quality Chapter” and “Attached Abstracts” under Issues and Events at citizensplanning.org)



CPA’s annual Sand Castle Festival at dawn

Conclusion

CPA is eager to receive comments and engage in further public dialogue about city planning issues. Please contact us by phone at 805-966-3979 or by email at info@citizensplanning.org



East de la Guerra Street - classic Santa Barbara