

Redondo Beach Expressed Mixed Feelings About Mixed Use

BY JOSH STEPHENS

Twenty-five years ago, the proliferation of mixed-use development was scarcely a glimmer in a New Urbanist’s eye. Today, of course, the practice of developing multistory buildings with retail on the ground floor and, typically, residences on the upper floors is a standard part of cities’ development plans, especially those that are pursuing sustainability and walkability.

But 1992 was when the City of Redondo Beach, in the

South Bay region of Los Angeles county, first adopted a mixed-use ordinance, perhaps ahead of its time. This year, when most other cities are embracing and promoting mixed-use, Redondo Beach recently took a step back.

In September, the city council adopted a two-year moratorium on all new mixed-use developments in the city. Proponents of the moratorium, including a vocal neighborhood group called Save the Riviera, raised

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insight
WILLIAM
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The CEQA End-Run

Once when I was a planning practitioner we had a debate about how to handle the determination of a particular program under the California Environmental Quality Act. My colleagues argued that we should do an environmental impact report because

otherwise we might get sued. I argued that we were going to get sued no matter what, so we might as well use an exemption. If we did an EIR, I said, some judge would just find that we didn’t do it right. On the other hand, if we used an exemption we

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After Decades, Newhall Ranch Approved in N. Los Angeles County

After 25 years of negotiations, lawsuits, acrimony, and revisited proposals, environmental groups [agreed](#) to conditions under which the Newhall Ranch mega-development of 58,000 residents in Santa Clarita Valley will proceed. Covering roughly 12,000 acres, it is expected to be the last major greenfield development to be approved in Los Angeles County. Under the deal, developer FivePoint Holdings agreed to provide about \$25 million for conservation efforts aimed at protecting a number of endangered species along the Santa Clara River and a separate agreement with a nonprofit Native American organization to provide a parcel and an undisclosed amount for construction of a multimillion-dollar cultural center. In exchange, the environmental and native American groups will drop lawsuits against the company and will not oppose development of new homes, golf courses, schools, recreation centers and 13 million square feet of commercial space. A first phase of Newhall Ranch was approved in July.

Los Angeles Takes Major Step to Promote Transit-Oriented Development

Los Angeles Department of City Planning [released](#) its official Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) guidelines. The new program was created through November's Measure

JJJ, a ballot measure that affects density bonuses citywide, and will incentivize the production of affordable housing by addressing all housing developments within a one-half mile of major transit stops. The TOC Affordable Housing Incentive areas are [designed](#) in tiers based on the type of transit and distance of the stop (Tier 1-4). The incentives vary depending on the density, amount and distance of the transit stop, open space, lot coverage, yards, and many more. These guidelines provide eligibility standards, incentives, and other necessary components of the program. Pursuant to Measure JJJ, the guidelines have been drafted and implemented by the Planning Department and did not require a vote of the city council. TOCs will be designated around the city's several-dozen transit stops.

Eight California Cities Submit Proposals for Amazon Headquarters

At least eight cities and coalitions of cities in California have [submitted](#) proposals, among 238 nationwide, to lure Amazon's second headquarters by the deadline, last Thursday. The company's criteria include leading universities systems, proximity to a major airport, and enough land to accommodate 8 million square feet and 50,000 employees. A multifaceted bid by the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, the City of Pomona, the Pomona Fairplex, and Cal Poly Pomona [proposed](#) a

joint plan through the Los Angeles Economic Development Corp. Irvine is bidding through the Irvine Company, and San Diego, and Chula Vista have each submitted proposals. Huntington Beach and Long Beach [teamed](#) up to offer "Sand, Sea and Air," which includes the Boeing campus with 500,000 square feet and a 164-acre campus that can accommodate 5.4 million buildable square feet adjacent to Long Beach Airport. [Santa Ana](#) has proposed a 10 million-square-foot hub with developer Michael Harrah in the old Orange County Register's building.

In the [Bay Area](#), the City of San Jose [submitted](#) a bid, as did a coalition of four cities — Concord, Fremont, Oakland, Richmond and San Francisco — with 60 million square feet of commercial across three counties. The proposal includes properties such as the former Concord Naval Weapons Stations, Hunters Point, and the Oakland Coliseum. It also includes 45,000 new homes with the motto: "Don't aggregate and coagulate. Disperse and be diverse". Gov. Jerry Brown offered hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks and other incentives if Amazon chooses a California city as its second home. (See prior CP&DR [commentary](#).)

Stockton Downtown Redevelopment Plan Moves Forward

The City of Stockton City Council voted unanimously to [approve](#) the first

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phase of downtown’s proposed Open Window redevelopment project. The proposed project includes 15-square-blocks of mixed-use development with about 1,000 residential units, 90,000 square-feet of commercial space, and 110,000 square feet of industrial/art studio space. Last week, the City Council increase the city’s commitment of funding from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development that is required to rebuild parts of downtown’s aging infrastructure. In 2016, the council voted to set aside \$3.8 million but that number has increased to \$6.18 million. The \$67.5 million project is expected to break ground in 2018.

Bakersfield Park Named to APA’s ‘Great Places’

American Planning Association released its 15 “Great Places in America”. These neighborhoods, public places or streets are celebrated for being exemplary planning that results in stronger, healthier, and more just communities. [Mill Creek Linear Park](#) in Bakersfield was the only California community to be a designee. The 1.5-mile urban trail won in the “2017 Great Public Spaces” category along with four other projects nationwide. The park was originally an irrigation canal that has evolved into the center of revitalization for downtown Bakersfield. It connects several civic resources and has been credited with spurring revitalization in downtown Bakersfield. The APA writes that the park “serves as a national model for how cities and rural communities can repurpose single-use canals into a multi-use focal point for an entire community.”

San Jose Mayor Proposes 25,000 New Units, with 10,000 Downtown

San Jose Mayor Sam

Licardo proposed constructing 25,000 residential units in the city over the next five years. Part of the proposal includes changing the landscape of downtown by increasing higher-density homes and more transit-oriented development. According to the mayor, half of the proposed units should be built in downtown and roughly 10,000 should be affordable units. Mayor Liccardo notes the city departments tasked with project, permit and building approvals is understaffed as well as the planning department. Several developers attended the event and said they have considerable units in the pipeline that assists the goal of the mayor’s proposal. However, director of public policy for Working Partnerships USA—a community coalition pushing for more affordable housing—says there needs to be stronger rent control policies and assurances that companies such as Google contribute to solving the housing crisis rather than just increasing housing prices. The City Council will consider the proposal during its Oct. 17 meeting. (See prior [CP&DR coverage](#) of downtown San Jose.)

Caltrans Releases State Rail Plan

By 2040, California will have an “integrated statewide” rail network, according to a new public [draft](#) of the California State Rail Plan plan released by Caltrans. The plan outlines a series of investments to connect most communities in California to each other at least every hour throughout the day, with many regions being connected with half-hourly service. It also highlights the critical role for the rail system to be expanded in its ability to move a growing volume of freight cleanly and efficiently. Caltrans intends for

these investments to lead to an easy-to-use rail system that provides faster and more frequent service, customer-friendly timed multimodal connections, integrated ticketing and trip planning, and increased reliability of travel in congested corridors. Caltrans is seeking public input between October 11 until December 11. Caltrans will hold public workshops across the state in San Luis Obispo Oct. 14, Fresno Oct. 30, Oakland Nov. 1, Sacramento Nov. 7, San Diego Nov. 13, San Bernardino Nov. 14, Los Angeles Nov. 15th, and an online webinar Dec. 6.

S.F. Releases Strategy to Reduce Homelessness

San Francisco’s Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing will [release](#) its “Five-Year Strategic Framework” to reduce homelessness this week. The plan’s goals are to cut the number of hard-core street people in half, ending family homelessness, and clearing away all large tent encampments. One of the key aims is to bundle the city’s homeless services tighter to make a Homelessness Response System that ties together the 15 existing independent databases now being used to track homeless people through housing, medical and other services. The new system should be fully up and running by December 2018. Other plans in the framework are to expand the Moving On Initiative to help 300 people leave supportive housing for independent living, open at least one new Navigation Center, ramp up family and youth aid programs and construct 1,367 new supportive housing units in five years. ■

2017 Legislative Roundup

BY CP&DR STAFF

Given the number of housing bills that the legislature and governor focus on this session, it's a wonder that they got anything else done. Nonetheless, they passed more than 50 laws related to land use this session.

Brown signed nine housing-related bills in addition to the 15 in the vaunted [package](#) of housing legislation. *Denotes bills in this package. (See prior CP&DR [coverage](#) of housing legislation.)

The most notable, and radical, land use measure concerns beleaguered the San Diego Association of Governments, which has been mired in scandal and the departure of longtime head Gary Gallegos. Assembly Bill 805 calls for reform of its governance structure and may impact how the state's other MPOs do business.

Conservation and open space got a good deal of attention, with many laws focusing on specific agencies and parcels. One that did not make it through was a law to ensure access to Martins Beach. Tech financier Vinod Kholsa has thus far refused to create a permanent easement to allow access through his coastal estate. With Kholsa already in violation of the Coastal Act, Brown does not want further legislation to muddy the waters.

Brown also vetoed the controversial telecommunications bill, Senate Bill 649. Proponents, including cell phone companies, said it would streamline the process for locating cell towers and other facilities. Opponents, including many city officials and the League of California Cities, saw the bill as a serious encroachment on their right to local control.

Essentially absent from this year's legislation: any major changes to the California Environmental Quality Act. With housing taken care of, stay tuned for that next year.

Housing & Affordable Housing: Development & Finance

[AB 74](#) (Chiu, D-San Francisco) - Housing

Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development, on or before January 1, 2019, to establish the Housing for a Healthy California Program to create

supportive housing opportunities through grants to counties for capital and operating assistance, as specified, or operating reserve grants and capital loans to developers, or both.

[AB 352](#) (Santiago, D-Los Angeles) – State Housing Law: Efficiency Units

Prohibits a city, county, or city and county from limiting the number of efficiency units in certain locations near public transit or university campuses, as specified.

[AB 494](#)(Bloom, D-Santa Monica) - Land Use: Accessory Dwelling Units

Provide that accessory dwelling unit may be rented separately from the primary residence. Provides that no setback be required for an existing garage that is converted to a portion of an accessory dwelling unit.

[AB 1086](#) (Daly, D-Anaheim) Housing: Regional Housing Needs

Makes additional findings regarding the relationship between the shortage of housing and the state's environmental policies. Requires the population forecast developed by the council of governments to be the basis upon which the department determines the existing and projected need for that region if the total regional population forecast for the project year is within 1.5% of the total regional population forecast prepared by the Department of Finance.

[AB 1598](#) (Mullin, D-South San Francisco) – Affordable Housing Authorities

Authorizes a city, county, or city and county to adopt a resolution creating an affordable housing authority with power limited to providing low- and moderate-income housing and affordable workforce housing, as defined, funded through a low- and moderate-income housing fund, as specified.

[AB 1637](#)(Gloria, D-San Diego) - City of San Diego: County of Santa Clara: Housing Authority: Middle-Income Housing Projects

Until January 1, 2022, authorizes a housing authority

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located in the City of San Diego or the County of Santa Clara to implement a pilot program to develop and finance a middle-income housing project, as defined, if the project receives gap financing, as defined.

SB 136 (Leyva, D-Chino) – Mobilehome Parks: Mobilehome Park Program Funding

Authorizes the department to contract directly with nonprofit corporations that have significant experience working with mobilehome park residents, or acquiring, rehabilitating, and preserving affordable housing, and have statewide or regional capacity to deliver technical assistance to mobilehome park residents or community-based nonprofit corporations in order to assist them in acquiring, financing, operating, and improving mobilehome parks occupied by low- and moderate-income households.

SB 147 (Dodd, D-Napa) – Mobilehome Parks: Residency

Authorizes any homeowner who lives alone to designate one other person per calendar year to share his or her mobilehome on an ongoing basis, except as specified, and would prohibit the imposition of a fee by management for that person. This bill would permit park management to require written confirmation from a licensed health care professional of the homeowner’s need for the care or supervision, if the need is not readily apparent or already known to management.

AB 863 (Cervantes, D-Corona) - Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program — Vetoed

Provides that a project receiving funding pursuant to the program shall be encouraged, among other things, to employ local entrepreneurs and workers utilizing appropriate workforce training programs. The bill would make related revisions to the policy objectives for the program.

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “I believe any additional refinements would be best addressed through the Strategic Growth Council’s process.”

AB 571 (E. Garcia, D-Coachella): Farmworker Housing: Income taxes: Insurance Tax: Credits

Makes it easier to develop farmworker housing by easing qualifications for the Farmworker Housing Tax Credit.

AB 879 (Grayson, D-Concord): Planning and Zoning: Housing Element*

Authorizes a study of local fees charged to new residential developments that will also include a proposal to substantially reduce such fees.

AB 1521 (Bloom/Chiu): Land use: Notice of Proposed Change: Assisted Housing Developments

Gives experienced housing organizations a first right of refusal to purchase affordable housing developments in order to keep the units affordable.

SB 2 (Atkins, D-San Diego): Building Homes and Jobs Act*

Establishes a permanent funding source for affordable housing through a \$75 fee on real estate transaction documents. The fee is capped at \$225 per transaction and exempts real estate sales. The fees would generate roughly \$250 million a year, which would be split among state and local housing programs.

SB 3 (Beall, D-San Jose): Veterans and Affordable Housing Bond Act of 2018*

authorizes \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for affordable housing programs and a veteran’s home ownership program. SB 3 must be approved by voters next November.

Housing & Affordable Housing: Planning & Zoning

AB 72 (Santiago/Chiu): Housing*

Strengthens the state’s ability to enforce laws that require local governments to achieve housing goals.

AB 73 (Chiu, D-San Francisco): Planning and Zoning: Housing Sustainability Districts*

Sives local governments incentives to create housing on infill sites near public transportation.

AB 678 (Bocanegra, D-Pacoima): Housing Accountability Act*

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Increases the standard of proof required for a local government to justify its denial of low- to moderate-income housing development projects. (AB 678 is identical to SB 167.)

AB 1397 (Low, D-Campbell): Local Planning: Housing Element: Inventory of Land for Residential Development*

Makes changes to the definition of land suitable for residential development to increase the number of sites where new multifamily housing can be built.

AB 1505 (Bloom/Bradford/Chiu/Gloria): Land Use: Zoning Regulations*

Authorizes cities and counties to adopt an inclusionary ordinance for residential rental units in order to create affordable housing.

AB 1515 (Daly, D-Anaheim): Planning and Zoning: Housing*

Allows housing projects to be afforded the protections of the Housing Accountability Act if the project is consistent with local planning rules despite local opposition.

SB 35 (Wiener, D-San Francisco): Planning and Zoning: Affordable Housing: Streamlined Approval Process*

streamlines the approval process for infill developments in local communities that have failed to meet their regional housing needs.

SB 166 (Skinner, D-Berkeley): Residential Density and Affordability*

ensures that cities maintain an ongoing supply of housing construction sites for residents of various income levels.

SB 167 (Skinner, D-Berkeley): Housing Accountability Act*

increases the standard of proof required for a local government to justify a denial of low- and moderate-income housing development projects. (SB 167 is identical to AB 678.)

SB 540 (Roth, D-Riverside) - Workforce Housing Opportunity Zone*

Authorizes a local government to establish a Workforce Housing Opportunity Zone.

Planning & Zoning

AB 465 (Ting, D-San Francisco) – Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones

Extends the authorization for a city, county, or city and county and a landowner to enter into contracts under the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones Act to January 1, 2029.

AB 1530 (Gonzalez Fletcher, D-San Diego) - Urban Forestry

Provides that the purpose of the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978 is also to promote policies and incentives that advance improved maintenance of urban forest canopy to optimize multiple benefits, among other purposes.

SB 732 (Stern, D-Agoura Hills) – General Plan: Agricultural Land

Authorizes a city and county to develop an agricultural land component of the city or county’s open-space element, or a separate agricultural land element.

SB 649 (Hueso, D-San Diego) – Wireless Telecommunications Facilities - Vetoed

Provides that a small cell, as defined, is a permitted use, subject only to a specified permitting process adopted by a city or county, if the small cell meets specified requirements.

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “The interest which localities have in managing rights of way requires a more balanced solution than the one achieved in this bill.”

AB 890 (Medina, D-Riverside) – Land Use: Planning and Zoning: Initiatives - Vetoed

Requires that the city council of a city or the board of supervisors of a county have exclusive authority to adopt or amend a general plan, specific plan, or zoning ordinance, that would convert any discretionary land use approval necessary for a project to ministerial approval; change the land use or zoning designation of a parcel or parcels to a more intensive designation; or authorize more intensive

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land uses within an existing land use designation or zoning designation.

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “Instead of the piecemeal approach taken in this bill, I prefer a more comprehensive CEQA review, which takes into account of the urgent need for more housing and thoughtful environmental analysis.”

Transportation

AB 179 (Cervantes, D-Corona) – California Transportation Commission

Requires the Governor, in appointing members, to use every effort to ensure that the commission has a diverse membership with expertise in transportation issues, taking into consideration factors including, but not limited to, socioeconomic background and professional experience, which may include experience working in, or representing, disadvantaged communities.

AB 467 (Mullin, D-South San Francisco) – Local Transportation Authorities: Transactions and Use Taxes

Upon the request of an authority, exempts a county elections official from including the entire adopted transportation expenditure plan in the voter information guide, if the authority posts the plan on its Internet Web site, and the sample ballot and the voter information guide sent to voters include information on viewing an electronic version of the plan on the Internet Web site, as prescribed, and for obtaining a printed copy of the plan by calling the county elections office.

AB 758 (Talamantes Eggman, D-Stockton) – Transportation: Tri-Valley-San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority.

Establishes the Tri-Valley-San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority for purposes of planning, developing, and delivering cost-effective and responsive transit connectivity between the Bay Area Rapid Transit District’s rapid transit system and the Altamont Corridor Express commuter rail service in the Tri-Valley, that meets the goals and objectives of the community, as specified.

AB 805 (Gonzalez Fletcher, D-San Diego)

County of San Diego: Transportation Agencies

Requires the mayor and the president of the city council of the City of San Diego to serve on the board of the San Deigo Association of Governments. Deletes the requirement for the chair of the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors to serve on the board. Requires the regional comprehensive plan to address greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets set by the State Air Resources Board and would require the plan to include strategies that provide for mode shift to public transportation.

AB 1444, Baker. Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority: Demonstration Project

Authorizes the Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority, in accordance with substantially similar conditions, to conduct a shared autonomous vehicle demonstration project for the testing of autonomous vehicles that do not have a driver seated in the driver’s seat and are not equipped with a steering wheel, a brake pedal, or an accelerator, as specified.

SB 150(Allen, D-Santa Monica)–Regional Transportation Plans

Requires the State Air Resources Board by September 1, 2018, and every 4 years thereafter, to prepare a report that assesses progress made by each metropolitan planning organization in meeting the regional greenhouse gas emission reduction targets set by the state board.

SB 595 (Beall): Metropolitan Transportation Commission: Toll Bridge Revenues; BART Inspector General; Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority: High-Occupancy Toll Lanes

Require the City and County of San Francisco and the other 8 counties in the San Francisco Bay area to conduct a special election, to be known as Regional Measure 3, on a proposed increase in the amount of the toll rate charged on the state-owned toll bridges in that area to be used for specified projects and programs. The bill would require BATA to select the amount of the proposed increase, not to exceed \$3, to be placed on the ballot for voter approval. **Creates** the Independent Office of the BART Inspector General within BART.

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Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space

AB 184 (Berman, D-Menlo Park) – Sea Level Rise Planning: Database

Existing law requires the Natural Resources Agency, in collaboration with the Ocean Protection Council, to create, update biannually, and post on an Internet Web site a Planning for Sea Level Rise Database describing steps being taken throughout the state to prepare for, and adapt to, sea level rise. Existing law repeals these provisions on January 1, 2018. This bill postpones that repeal until January 1, 2023.

AB 466 (Bocanegra, D-Pacoima) – Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group

Establishes with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group. Requires, by March 1, 2019, the working group to develop, through watershed-based planning methods and community engagement, a revitalization plan for the Upper Los Angeles River.

SB 5 (de León, D-Los Angeles) – California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018

Enacts the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018, which, if approved by the voters, would authorize the issuance of bonds in an amount of \$4,000,000,000 pursuant to the State General Obligation Bond Law to finance a drought, water, parks, climate, coastal protection, and outdoor access for all program.

SB 42 (Hill, D-San Mateo) - Public Lands: Martins Beach: Property Acquisition - Vetoed

Creates the Martins Beach Subaccount in the fund, and would require that moneys received from public and private sources, including nonprofit sources, to be used for the creation of that public access route be deposited into that subaccount and continuously appropriated to the commission for expenditure to acquire that right-of-way or easement, as prescribed, and be expended in accordance with a specified priority.

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “The public’s right to access Martins Beach will be determined in further judicial and administrative proceedings.”

SB 44 (Jackson, D-Santa Barbara) – State lands: coastal hazard and legacy oil and gas well removal and remediation program.

Upon appropriation of moneys by the Legislature, require the commission to, within 2 years, administer a coastal hazard and legacy oil and gas well removal and remediation program.

SB 50 (Allen, D-Santa Monica) – Federal public lands: conveyances.

Establishes, except as provided, a policy of the state to discourage conveyances of federal public lands in California from the federal government. The bill would, except as provided, specify that these conveyances are void ab initio unless the commission was provided with the right of first refusal or the right to arrange for the transfer of the federal public land to another entity.

AB 250 (Gonzalez Fletcher, D-San Diego) – State Coastal Conservancy: Lower Cost Coastal Accommodations Program.

Requires the State Coastal Conservancy to develop and implement a specified Lower Cost Coastal Accommodations Program intended to facilitate improvement of existing, and development of new, lower cost accommodations within 1 1/2 miles of the coast.

SB 214(Atkins, D-San Diego) – San Diego River Conservancy

Specifies that the powers of the San Diego River Conservancy include improving, developing, and preserving lands for the purpose of protecting the natural, cultural, and historical resources, and entering into a joint powers agreement, as specified. The bill would additionally authorize the conservancy to award grants to a joint powers agency, special district, or tribal nation, as defined, and would subject these entities to the specified conditions. The bill would also provide that the conservancy is authorized to seek repayment of grant moneys if the terms and conditions of the grant agreement are not met.

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SB 367 (Bates, R-Laguna Niguel) – Tidelands and Submerged Lands: County of Orange

Extends to 66 years the maximum period for which the County of Orange may grant franchises or leases for the use of those tidelands and submerged lands.

SB 492 (Beall, D-San Jose) – Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District: Purchase of Property: San Jose Water Company

Authorizes the San Jose Water Company to sell lands in the Upper Guadalupe River watershed, including the Los Gatos Creek and Saratoga Creek watersheds, to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District until January 1, 2023, as specified.

SB 507 (Hueso, D-San Diego) – Tijuana River Valley

Authorizes the money granted to the County of San Diego to be available for the development, improvement, rehabilitation, protection, and restoration of natural and park lands in the Tijuana River Valley, for specified studies of the land, as provided, and for the development of a campground, as provided.

SB 580 (Pan, D-Sacramento) – Water Development Projects: Sacramento-San Joaquin Watersheds

This bill revises the authorization for the project for flood control along the American and Sacramento Rivers as further modified by a specified report adopted by Congress.

SB 615 (Hueso, D-San Diego) – Salton Sea Restoration

Specifies that any barrier in the Salton Sea within or below a certain elevation would not be considered a dam and would provide that the construction of facilities to separate fresh water from highly saline water for the purposes of implementing restoration activities pursuant to the act shall not be subject to review, approval, inspection, or fees associated with certain laws relating to dams and reservoirs.

SB 667 (Atkins, D-San Diego) – Department of Water Resources: Riverine and Riparian Stewardship Improvements

Requires the department to establish a program to implement watershed-based riverine and riparian stewardship improvements by providing technical and financial assistance in support of projects with certain benefits. Requires the program to support the purposes of and be coordinated with the Urban Streams Restoration Program, fish passage improvements, and other similar programs.

SB 693 (Mendoza, D-Artesia) – Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Park District

Authorizes the establishment of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Park District. Specifies that the district has financing authority under existing law and would further prescribe additional functions and duties of the district, including, but not limited to, the acquisition, construction, improvement, maintenance, and operation of open space and parks along the Lower San Gabriel River.

SB 80 (Wieckowski, D-Fremont) – California Environmental Quality Act: Notices - Vetoed

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “The current CEQA process is very detailed, and requires an incredible amount of notice.”

Infrastructure

AB 56 (Holden, D-Pasadena) – California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank: Housing

Revises the definition of the term “public development facilities” for purposes of the Bergeson-Peace Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank Act to mean real and personal property, structures, conveyances, equipment, thoroughfares, buildings, and supporting components thereof, excluding any housing, that are directly related to providing, among other things, housing-related infrastructure, which includes city streets; drainage, water supply, and flood control; environmental mitigation measures; power and communications; public transit improvement that directly supports transit-oriented housing; sewage collection and treatment; and water treatment and distribution.

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SB 680, Wieckowski. San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District

Existing law authorizes the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District to take by gift, or take or convey by grant, purchase, devise, or lease, and hold and enjoy, real and personal property of every kind within and without the district necessary for, incidental to, or convenient for, transit-oriented joint development projects, defined as commercial, residential, or mixed-use developments that are undertaken in connection with existing, planned, or proposed transit facilities and are located 1/4 mile or less from the external boundaries of that facility. This bill extends the maximum distance in that definition to 1/2 mile.

AB 733 (Berman, D-Menlo Park) – Enhanced Infrastructure Financing districts: projects: Climate Change

Authorizes the use of enhanced infrastructure financing districts to finance projects that enable communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change, including, but not limited to, specified impacts described in the bill, and would make conforming changes to the Legislature’s findings and declarations.

AB 1568 (Bloom, D-Santa Monica) - Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts.

Enact the Neighborhood Infill Finance and Transit Improvements Act, which would authorize a city, county, or city and county to adopt a resolution, at any time before or after the adoption of the infrastructure refinancing plan, to allocate specified tax revenues to the district under specified circumstances. This bill would require the legislative body of a city or county establishing an enhanced infrastructure financing district that will allocate those revenues, as described, to adopt an ordinance to establish the procedure by which the city or county will calculate the amount of revenues that will be dedicated to the proposed district.

AB 696 (Caballero, D-Salinas) – Department of Transportation: Prunedale Bypass: County of Monterey: disposition of excess properties.

Requires the net proceeds from the sale of any excess properties originally acquired for a replacement alignment for State Highway Route 101 in the County of Monterey, known as the former Prunedale Bypass, to be reserved in the State Highway Account for programming and allocation by the commission, with the concurrence of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, for other state highway projects in that county, as specified. The bill would exempt these funds from the distribution formulas otherwise applicable to transportation capital improvement funds.

From Gov. Brown’s veto message: “These revenues are used to pay existing debt service on transportation construction projects statewide.”

Economic & Community Development

AB 246 by Assemblymember Miguel Santiago (D-Los Angeles) – Environmental quality: Jobs and Economic Improvement Through Environmental Leadership Act of 2011.

Increases the certification of the project to LEED gold or better and increase the transportation efficiency to a 15% greater standard. The bill would require the project applicant to demonstrate compliance with requirements for commercial and organic waste recycling, as applicable.

AB 755 (Garcia, D-Coachella) - Local agencies: capital investment incentive program.

Existing law, until January 1, 2018, authorizes a county, city and county, or city to establish a capital investment incentive program, pursuant to which the county, city and county, or city is authorized to pay a capital investment incentive amount to the proponent of a qualified manufacturing facility for up to 15 consecutive years.

This bill extends that authorization to January 1, 2019. ■

legal digest

Nothing Unusual About Telegraph Hill

BY WILLIAM FULTON

In an important followup to the *Berkeley Hillside* case, the First District Court of Appeal has upheld a CEQA exemption for a three-unit condo project just below Coit Tower in San Francisco.

Neighbors argued that the project's unique location on Telegraph Hill represented "unique circumstances" that should have overridden the CEQA exemption. Relying on the California Supreme Court's ruling in [Berkeley Hillside Preservation v. City of Berkeley](#) (2015) 60 Cal.4th 1086, the appellate court disagreed.

"[T]he project is within the density, height and bulk limitations for its designated zoning," wrote Justice Peter Siggins for a unanimous three-judge panel. "It will also be immediately adjacent to a four unit building of similar proportion. It would be odd at best for us to conclude a development project that conforms with zoning requirements on Telegraph Hill is in and of itself an unusual circumstance that requires CEQA review. We decline to do so."

The court also rejected the neighbors' argument that conditions of approval imposed by the San Francisco Planning Commission were really mitigations under the California Environmental Quality

Act, suggesting that the CEQA exemption was invalid. But the court knocked that argument down also, creating a potentially important distinction between

The case involved a plan to restore a 1,000-square-foot 1906 cottage and building three new condominiums ranging in size from 3,700 to 4,200 square feet, all on a mostly vacant 7,500-square-foot lot just below Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill. Although the proposed development project is similar in scale to adjacent buildings, it generated controversy in the neighborhood. (More background on the project, including photographs of the site and the proposed project, can be found in an SFCurbed article [here](#).)

The Planning Commission approved the project in 2014 with a number of conditions of approval designed to minimize the disruption of the project during construction. Under the San Francisco City Charter, the Planning Commission has broad discretionary power to impose conditions on projects. The Planning Commission also exempted the cottage rehab from CEQA under a categorical exemption for restoration and rehabilitation, and the three condos because the project was less than four units.

The citizen group Protect

Telegraph Hill sued, arguing that the exemptions were wrongly applied and the conditions imposed were really CEQA mitigations that were inappropriate to be imposed in a conditional use case. San Francisco Superior Court Judge Teri L. Jackson ruled in favor of the city and Protect Telegraph Hill appealed.

On appeal, the neighbors argued that, among other things, the situation involved "unusual circumstances" that should have overridden the CEQA exemptions. The neighbors called the location and site constraints "unequivocally rare," and says the exception applies because it is the "first among the 'Outstanding and Unique Areas' that 'contribute in an extraordinary degree to San Francisco's visual form and character.'" The neighbors also argued that this unique character is reflected in the city's general plan and urban design element.

But the appellate court disagreed. "The City rejected the notion that the designation of Telegraph Hill in the urban design element supports a claim of unusual circumstances, and so do we," the court wrote. "The full description of the Hill in the element shows that it is lined with low, small-scale buildings with flat roofs that hug

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the topography. While one may argue the scale of the proposed building, this seems a question of degree rather than an unusual circumstance.”

The neighbors’ other major argument was that the conditions of approval were really CEQA mitigations that the city should not have imposed as part of a conditional use approval. But the court wrote, “There is simply nothing in this record that demonstrates the Board was imposing the additional conditions in order to mitigate the project’s significant environmental effects as opposed to taking precautions to address the ordinarily anticipated inconvenience and danger that arises when significant construction activity

“While one may argue the scale of the proposed building, this seems a question of degree rather than an unusual circumstance.”

occurs in a congested urban environment like San Francisco’s Telegraph Hill.” ■

The Case:

[Protect Telegraph Hill v. City and](#)

[County of San Francisco](#), No. A148544 (published October 13, 2017)

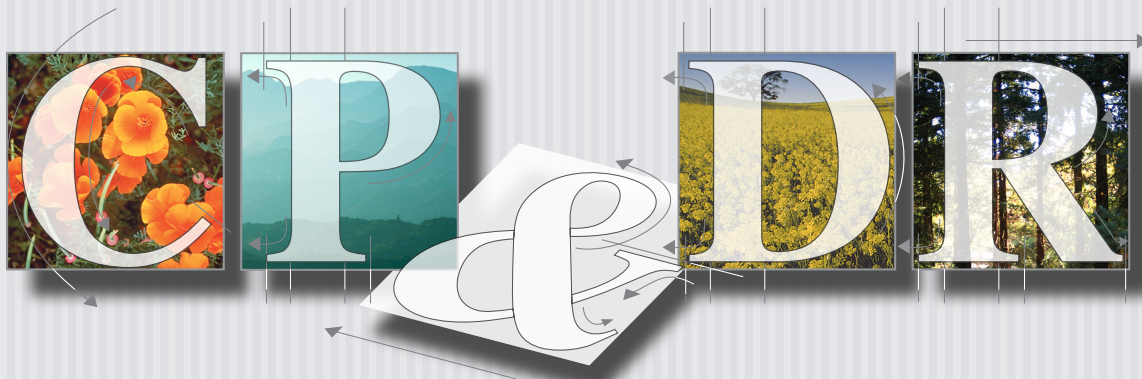
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Legal Briefs

BY WILLIAM FULTON

The First District Court of Appeal has concluded that a challenge to a 16-home project on Laurel Way in Redwood City is not ripe for a challenge under the Subdivision Map Act. The city issued a planned development permit, which covered the installation of infrastructure but not actual approval of the homes. A citizen group challenged the approval, claiming that the Subdivision Map Act's grandfather provision did not apply to the 1926 Map

that is being used for the project. But the appellate court ruled that because the PDP dealt only with infrastructure and not actual homes, the challenge was not ripe. *Save Laurel Way v. City of Redwood City, A147942*.

In a complicated case from Contra Costa County, the First District has upheld the county's decision to revoke development permits for the owners of the Bayseng Spice Company. Seeking to build a house and a commercial building near the

Caldecott Tunnel, the family rebuilt a sewer for Caltrans and hooked into the City of Oakland sewer system. But neither Oakland nor the Local Agency Formation Commission ever actually approved the sewer connection and the appellate court concluded that Caltrans's authority wasn't pre-emptive because the sewer was not connected to its core mission. *Attard v. Board of Supervisors of Contra Costa County, No. A138702*.



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>>> Redondo Beach Expressed Mixed Feelings About Mixed Use

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concerns that mixed-use developments were straining local infrastructure, including sewage and roads, and were not performing as the city had intended. Redondo Union School District officials voiced concerns that more housing would stress local schools.

“Current vertical mixed-use in Redondo Beach that allows 35 units per acre with allowable density bonuses for affordable housing has not worked,” said Mayor Bill Brand. “It has created traffic problems that continue to worsen and threaten the health and safety of our residents while providing little affordable housing.”

The moratorium is designed to prevent further stresses until the city can comprehensively update its general plan, a process that is in the offing.

“It prevents more out-of-scale, out of character development that are paving over commercial square footage....for primarily residential,” said City Council Member Nils Nehrenheim, formerly a leader of Save the Riviera.

In particular, ground-floor commercial space was, reportedly, under-performing and therefore not generating the tax revenues that the city had anticipated. One mixed-use development replaced a car dealership, which had been “giving the city phenomenal tax revenue,” according to Nehrenheim.

While the moratorium may appear to be a rejection of progressive urban planning trends — especially in a region with a severe housing shortage — Redondo Beach officials insist that it is nothing of the sort. They say it is a specific response to a unique set of circumstances.

“I am a huge proponent of mixed use. I think it’s an excellent zoning tool and use of certain land,” said Nehrenheim.

In some ways, the idea of pedestrian-friendly development never made sense on many of the parcels to

which the mixed-use ordinance applied. Redondo Beach does not have a traditional downtown area, and much of the development in question was taking place on Pacific Coast Highway, which is a major, multilane thoroughfare.

“(Planners) chose this area because they wanted to create focal points of activity. The areas they chose....is along a traffic corridor whose speed limits is 40 miles per hour. How do you create focal points of activity on a state highway?” said Nehrenheim.

Ground-floor commercial space was, reportedly, under-performing and therefore not generating the tax revenues that the city had anticipated.

Redondo Beach’s experience also suggests that the city’s originally conceptions of mixed use may have been half-baked. Mixed use developments to not, in and of themselves, create activity if they are located poorly.

“I think with all mixed use, the commercial viability can be questionable,” said Jones. “You get two blocks from the core and the commercial can be marginal.”

Tax revenues and neighborhood character aside, traffic on PCH may be the driving force behind some of the opposition to mixed use. Proponents of the moratorium say that, essentially, the city has too much housing — or not enough jobs. Rather than supply housing for people who work in Redondo Beach, more housing will simply mean more commuters who leave the city in the morning and return in the evening, thus exacerbating traffic rather than alleviating it.

“There’s pretty much a mass transit disconnect between the south end of the South Bay, and that covers Torrance, Redondo, Hermosa Beach,” said Bruce Szekes, of Save the Riveriera. “Right now a lot of the intersections in the beach are poor at current counts without adding any more density.”

Moreover, city officials say that Redondo Beach is already doing its part to alleviate the region’s housing crisis by meeting its Regional Housing Needs Assessment targets. They point fingers at neighboring cities that have

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>>> Redondo Beach Expressed Mixed Feelings About Mixed Use

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disregarded RHNA and even become less dense in recent years.

“A lot of coastal communities are dealing with the strong demand for housing,” said Jones. “With our RHNA numbers, we’re doing our part.”

Mayor Bill Brand said that further housing development should focus on subsidized housing.

“Horizontal mixed-use with required low income affordable housing for larger projects is a much better approach,” said Brand.

Nonetheless, the South Bay’s economy has boomed in recent years with the rise of industrial and technology companies such as SpaceX and Tesla, creating further demand for market-rate housing.

In practice, though, the moratorium may not mean much. Three mixed-use developments were recently approved. The Legado, with over 100 residential units, was approved after months of rancor — and a lawsuit by the developer -- shortly before the moratorium took effect.

While those projects get underway, the city is embarking

on an update to its general plan, which is expected to include a revised approach to mixed use. A General Plan Advisory Committee has been convened to “examining how to better plan our communities and mitigate the threats to our health and safety that increasing traffic gridlock causes,” according to Brand.

While proponents of the moratorium would like the city to maintain modest residential densities — around a maximum of 30 units per acre, down from the current 35 — the moratorium does not necessarily mean that mixed-use will be forever banished from the city. ■

Contacts & Resources

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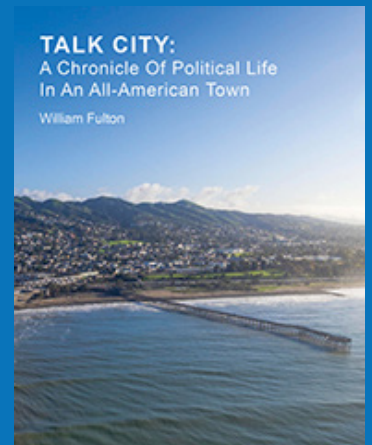
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A Chronicle Of Political Life
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William Fulton



>>> The CEQA End-Run

– CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

had a chance of winning outright.

I lost that battle, but throughout California it often seems as though the point of view I argued in that case is winning the war. Increasingly, cities and counties – and even the state government – are finding it simpler to work *around* CEQA than to work *within* the law’s damned complicated world. This is true not only at the local level, but increasingly at the state level as well.

Let’s take the locals first. There are a lot of CEQA exemptions – both statutory and “categorical” (which means they are determined by bureaucrats, not the legislature). Traditionally, however, lead agencies have been reluctant to use them. That’s because throughout CEQA’s history, the courts have usually been inclined to find something wrong with a lead agency’s CEQA determination and order the agency to do something different. (And remember, it is the courts – not the legislature – that have traditionally driven the outlines of CEQA practice.) The best way to bulletproof a CEQA action was to always do the most comprehensive environmental analysis you could. Though it was meant to save time, use of an exemption could be a waste of time – you get all the way to the end and approve the project, and some judge tells you the exemption didn’t apply and you’d have to do the CEQA analysis anyway. Why not just do it up front? It was the same thinking that caused lead agencies to often do EIRs when they didn’t really have to.

It is in this context that the California Supreme Court’s 2015 ruling *in Berkeley Hillside Preservation v. City of Berkeley*, 60 Cal.4th 1086, is beginning to loom pretty

large. If ever there was a case for a lead agency shying away from use of an exemption, this was it. The locale was a city that has been NIMBY central in California planning for decades. And the project was not easy to sympathize with: It was a huge expansion of an already large house by tech zillionaire Mitch Kapor in an already hard-to-get-to neighborhood in the Berkeley hills.

Increasingly, cities and counties – and even the state government – are finding it simpler to work around CEQA than to work within the law’s damned complicated world.

Yet the city threw two exemptions at Kapor’s project: It was a single-family house and it was in an infill location. Predictably, NIMBY neighbors threw the kitchen sink at the city in a lawsuit, claiming that the nature of the project triggered the “unusual circumstances” override of exemptions contained in the CEQA Guidelines. The Cal Supremes didn’t rule in favor of the city outright, but opened the door for a victory by the city in the lower courts.

Subsequently, the First District Court of Appeal has issued three rulings that heavily depend on the *Berkeley Hillside* ruling. On remand from the *Hillside* case specifically, the court **reversed itself and ruled in favor of the city**. The court also ruled that there were **no unusual circumstances associated with a fundraiser at the Santa Cruz rodeo grounds**. And earlier

this month – in maybe the most startling case of all – the First District **rejected the unusual circumstances argument and upheld an exemption** for a condo project just below Coit Tower in San Francisco.

It’s hard to imagine that the California Supreme Court of 20 or 30 years ago would have opened the door to exemptions the way the court did in 2015 in the *Berkeley Hillside* case. It’s even harder to imagine the San Francisco Planning Commission of 20 or 30 years ago using an

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>>> The CEQA End-Run

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exemption on a project adjacent to Coit Tower. But that’s how CEQA practice has changed in California in recent years.

It’s probably too strong a statement to say that the trend toward exemptions represents an “end run” around CEQA. But it’s undeniable that there *is* a trend: Cities and counties are using exemptions more often, and the courts are upholding those exemptions more often. It’s one of the ways the CEQA logjam is being broken.

Interestingly, something similar is going on in Sacramento: Instead of trying to reform CEQA, political leaders – especially Gov. Jerry Brown – are simply trying to end-run it with legislation beefing up “by-right” development approvals.

It wasn’t so long ago that comprehensive CEQA reform was the Holy Grail of California planning. The leading hunter in this search was state Senate leader Darrell Steinberg, now mayor of Sacramento, who fought an uphill battle against Jerry Brown on CEQA reform with [some modest successes](#).

However, comprehensive CEQA reform is unpopular with key Democratic constituencies, notably environmentalists and labor, who use CEQA to extract concessions from

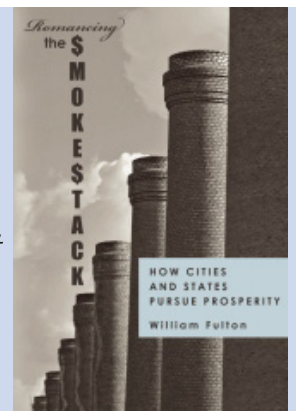
developers. So, since Steinberg left the legislature in 2014, Brown has focused on a different approach: creating by-right approvals for certain projects, especially for affordable housing. Indeed, he has basically demanded by-right legislation in exchange for his support of housing bonds. Last year he failed but this year he succeeded. It may well be that there are so many bells and whistles attached to this year’s bill that – to mix metaphors – [only a unicorn project](#) will qualify. But nevertheless, a by-right bill *did* pass this year.

It’s important to understand the move toward state-mandated by-right approvals in the context of CEQA. Simply put, in the absence of CEQA reform, by-right legislation is, like an exemption, a kind of end-run around CEQA. Remember that CEQA does not apply to ministerial actions – only discretionary actions. And by-right legislation turns a discretionary action into a ministerial action. Poof, CEQA disappears.

CEQA’s not going away. It’s too deeply embedded in the California planning culture and too useful to important political constituencies. But as the exemption and by-right stories suggest, more and more, in order to get things done, we’re going to simply end-run the whole CEQA process. ■

Romancing the \$moke \$tack How Cities And States Pursue Prosperity

Bill Fulton’s Book On Economic Development



The World Series of The Sun Belt

I've lived in both cities. I've devoted most of my professional career to understanding the two of them. And, conflicted as I am about who to root for in the World Series, I'll say this: It's a great matchup because Los Angeles and Houston are so similar as urban places – the two largest cities in the American Sun Belt. And as a Houstonian, it's worth saying that Los Angeles holds important lessons – good and bad – about our future.

When I moved to Houston three years ago – after living in Southern California for thirty years – the thing that struck me more than anything was how similar its urban form is to Los Angeles. An enormous, low-rise city laid out on a grid across a gigantic coastal plane. Glued together by a highly developed freeway system. Punctuated by large job centers scattered across the landscape. Slowly realizing that maybe cars aren't the answer to everything. And gradually rediscovering the underlying natural environment that gave rise to the city in the first place.

Over time, I've come to see that even in non-physical terms, the two cities are similar. Demographically, this similarity is really striking. Both cities are about 40% Hispanic, and their metro areas have an enormous array of nationalities and ethnicities. The only big demographic difference is that, because it was traditionally a Southern city, Houston has a larger African-American population.

But even in that case, what's important is not the difference but the *connection*. Los Angeles's black population migrated largely from Texas and Louisiana, and the connections back and forth are important. (In Walter Moseley's Easy Rawlins novels, Easy lives in South-Central but grew up in the Fifth Ward.) As one of the westernmost historically

black colleges and universities, Texas Southern draws more than its share of Angelenos.

And among other ethnic groups, Houston is increasingly viewed as an affordable alternative to Los Angeles. Houston has the largest Vietnamese population outside of California and the relationships among East Asian communities in particular is strong. Not long ago I spoke with a dentist and his wife of Chinese extraction who grew up in Los

Angeles and then lived in the East and the Midwest. They settled in Houston because of the large Chinese population and the general view that, if they couldn't afford to live in Los Angeles, Houston was the next-best place to be a Chinese-American.

It's a little facile too easy to say that Houston and L.A. are similar because they grew up as postwar auto-oriented cities. It's important to understand that, at least at their core, both cities are older than you might think. Yes, they are the two largest cities in the Sun Belt. But they have been the two largest cities in the Sun Belt since 1950, when Houston passed New Orleans as the largest city in the South. L.A. emerged early as a center of aerospace and manufacturing, Houston as a center of cotton trading and then energy. Both benefited greatly from World War II industrialization. Both are port cities, and in fact the expansion of the Panama Canal is likely to increase the competition between the ports. Both had – and still have – enormous freight

rail infrastructures, which are deeply interconnected. (It's not unusual for freight traffic in L.A. to get screwed up because of some snafu in the Port of Houston.)

Nevertheless, it is true that they both boomed in the 30 years after World War II to become the poster children for Sun Belt sprawl, both good and bad. L.A. and Houston were carpet-bombed with basic, low-amenity suburban

It's a little facile too easy to say that Houston and L.A. are similar because they grew up as postwar auto-oriented cities. Yes, they are the two largest cities in the Sun Belt. But they have been the two largest cities in the Sun Belt since 1950.

The World Series of The Sun Belt

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tracts in the '60s and '70s. Yet they have also been centers of urban innovation. When I was a young urban planner learning about “new towns,” everything I read kept leading me back to Irvine and The Woodlands, which are similarly innovative as master-planned communities. Even in baseball, the two cities were leaders of postwar suburban innovation. Dodger Stadium and the Astrodome – dating from 1962 and 1965, respectively – were hands down the two most important and innovative baseball stadiums built between the 1920s and the 1990s. These were the stadiums that led the way with exploding scoreboards, varied cuisine, and ample parking.

As I learn more about this moment in Houston's history, I am struck by the similarities with the Los Angeles I lived in during the late '80s and early '90s. The emerging world-class traffic problems. (The 610 Loop around The Galleria reminds me so much of the 405 on the Westside.) The dependence on traditional industries that may not be around forever. The struggles of a black-white city accommodating a wide range of emerging ethnicities, especially a fast-growing Hispanic population. The unaffordable housing. The gradual coming to terms with the idea that a world-class city must be urban, not suburban, in nature.

And so what can we learn from L.A.? My takeaway is: Don't wait too long to embrace the need to be a more urban place. For Los Angeles, the tipping point came in the '90s, when traffic got so bad Angelenos began to realize they would never be able to fix the problem with more freeway lanes. Since then, L.A. has embarked on the largest transit construction effort of any American city in the last 100 years. It will pay off in the long run, but in the short run traffic is still miserable, the transit oases are few and far between, and Angelenos are taxing themselves to death trying to get ahead in the process. So don't get too far behind the curve – in transportation, housing, and diversifying the economic base.

Oh, and by the way: I'm not really having a hard time deciding who to root for. The Dodgers are a great ballclub. But the Astros are the most exciting, fun young team I've seen in a really long time.

– BILL FULTON | OCT 24, 2017 ■



Searching for Los Angeles in *Blade Runner 2049*

If ever a movie made a star out of a building, the movie was *Blade Runner* and the star was the [Bradbury Building](#). Rumor has it that it was restored in part because of the fame director Ridley Scott conferred on it by making it the setting for the death of Roy Batty, the emotional undoing of Deckard, and one of the more potent testimonies to the fragility of humanity.

The real Los Angeles is thus better off for what happened in the fictional Los Angeles. Then again, 2019 is still two years away.

Blade Runner created a dystopic vision of Los Angeles that remains as culturally potent today — if not more so — than it was when it came out in 35 years ago. It shows up in books, [articles](#), and offhand remarks with astounding regularity. It's a testament to the arresting visuals of

For all the theorizing about *Blade Runner*, it's worth asking not what Scott was saying about the future of Los Angeles (or of cities in general) but rather why he chose Los Angeles in the first place.

If *Blade Runner* had taken place in an older, more endearing city — say San Francisco or London — we'd be sad to witness its demise. If it had taken place someplace more generic, like Phoenix, Denver, or Gotham City, we might not care. Los Angeles hit the sweet spot between lamentation and acceptance, and, as Mike Davis says, between sunshine and noir. Director Ridley Scott, like his fellow Briton Reyner Banham, approached Los Angeles with equal parts dread and fascination. His choice was not so much a commentary on the Los Angeles of the future but rather of the Los Angeles of the present.



K trudges down a sunless street in Los Angeles in 2049.

hyper-dense polyglot streets illuminated by sparkling advertisements and the possibility, however slim, that our sunny, spread-out paradise could, someday, become one of the dark places of the earth. After all, perhaps the biggest fantasy to come out of Los Angeles is Los Angeles itself.

The challenge that speculative fiction faces, of course, is that eventually the future catches up with it.

Blade Runner 2049 takes place 30 years later, in an even bleaker world. An apparent combination of nuclear war, climate change, and technological sabotage has rendered

Searching for Los Angeles in Blade Runner 2049

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the planet even less habitable than it was before. The dove that Batty released years ago has left no offspring.

J.F. Sebastian, the sad-eyed toymaker in the first film, jokes, “No housing shortage around here. Plenty of room for everybody” since everyone who can has moved Off-World. That’s how he can afford an entire office building for his dolls and marionettes and how Deckard can afford to live in an architectural masterpiece on a cop’s salary. In the intervening years, though, the housing shortage has returned with a vengeance, not necessarily because the world has more inhabitants but because it has less land. The moral question, of course, is whether the city should accept all who need safe haven. That’s the same question that today’s Los Angeles is asking itself – or [should be](#) asking itself, at any rate.

In 2049, untold numbers of stragglers, humans and replicants alike are forced into cities, where they subsist on synthetic food and artificial light. In fact, there may be no cities – plural. From the looks of things, there may be nothing else left besides Los Angeles, with all of humanity and non-humanity crammed into a piece of land whose chief virtue is that it is not radioactive. K, the new blade runner designed to hunt his own kind, searches among tens — or maybe hundreds — of millions of Los Angeles residents, all waiting for their time to die.

Areal shots depict the city’s familiar endless rows of boulevards and residential streets. The houses that dot Reyner Banham’s Plains of Id are replaced by high-rise shantytowns, made up of apartment buildings, each many stories tall, each more dilapidated than the last. Mere dingbats they are not. In this Blade Runner, the billboards walk the street, as 80-foot tall interactive holograms that shake their asses just for you. (We’ve come a long way from Angelyne.) Skyscrapers rise into the ochre fog, and all is overshadowed by the new citadel of the Wallace Corporation, the corporation that rose from the ashes of

By avoiding Los Angeles entirely, the sequel lacks that exquisite ambivalence, making Los Angeles seem less human.

Tyrell.

There’s a popular Angeleno parlor game in which you try to spot real-life locations, whether they’re playing themselves or standing in for other places. The original Blade Runner was not all fantasy. Somewhere beneath the gas flares, the billboards, and Tyrell’s pyramid are the Ennis House, Union Station, and, of course, the Bradbury Building. These locations give Blade Runner a sense of reality, at least to those of us who live in L.A. -- a chilling reminder that that the future may be closer at hand than we think.

That game brings few rewards with Blade Runner 2049.

Director Denis Villeneuve wisely avoided the Bradbury Building, which, in the world of Blade Runner, is as fraught and freighted as Calvary. But it was far from his only omission.

In fact, not a single, structure or landscape connects fiction to reality. Villeneuve offers no ruins or repurposed vestiges of the old city. The camera catches no glimpses of a ruined Dodger Stadium, a looted Getty Center, or even a lifeless palm tree. The Wilshire Grand does not stand next to the fictional police station. We know Blade Runner 2049 takes place in Los Angeles only because of arbitrary signifiers, like the LAPD, and because of its cosmetic resemblance to the city in the previous film, not to the one that lives and breathes, evolving before our eyes.

In only a single, fleeting sequence in does the cityscape of Los Angeles become legible. K flies his Spinner police cruiser over a recognizable, but altered, expanse of the Los Angeles Basin towards what used to be the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Tendrils of ocean creep into what used to be Venice and the other coastal communities. A metal seawall the height of the Hoover Dam and width of the coastline itself protects the city from the bloated Pacific.

It’s obviously not a prescription. And yet, some among us appreciate the original Blade Runner for its urbanity: the

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Searching for Los Angeles in Blade Runner 2049

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density, the diversity, and the grit. By avoiding Los Angeles entirely, the sequel lacks that exquisite ambivalence, making Los Angeles seem less human — it is a replicant of itself. Los Angeles does not so much play itself as it stands in for the entire world, obliterated beyond recognition. Villeneuve’s vision conveys more about the future of cities in general than it does about Los Angeles specifically. (Las Vegas makes a cameo, however.)

Scott put it, “Hong Kong on a bad day”, the updated version is closer to Mumbai or Lagos. The misery and squalor of K’s Los Angeles of the future prevails today in plenty of real places on our own planet. Add rising seas or an unthinkable human tragedy, and more people may have to cram into smaller areas. Urban planners are going to have to be ready for that — maybe not in California, but in plenty of other places — and we’re going to need compassion, cooperation,



A seawall protects what is left of Los Angeles from the risen Pacific.

Interestingly, of all the reasons that Scott might have envisioned for the demise of the world, climate change surely was not one of them. *Blade Runner* came out in 1982, after all. If anything, he probably had in mind the Cold War, signified by passing references to our them-communist antagonists, Russia and China. So, while the fictional city hasn’t changed much, its allegorical power has changed dramatically, as the real threats to humanity have evolved (and, arguably, worsened).

So, *Blade Runner* may yet turn out to be a prediction. If the Los Angeles of the original *Blade Runner* was, as Ridley

and emotional resilience just as dearly as we’re going to need planning wisdom and technological advances.

We’re all going to have to be ready to find out how human we really are.

Images courtesy of Sony Pictures.

– JOSH STEPHENS | OCT 16, 2017 ■

Amazon, Come Into Our Waiting Arms!

Here's a dream request-for proposals, if ever there was one: Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos recently kicked off a site search for a 5 million-square-foot "second headquarters" for his fast-growing e-commerce, newspaper publishing, luxury food, and film production concern. (Can you believe this guy got started selling *books*?)

To qualify as the future home of Amazon, Mr. Bezos is asking for a community with a population of at least 1 million people, good public schools, a major airport, and a decent public transit system. The game is afoot.

Insofar as no city in California can meet all three of these criteria (indeed, *Slate* writer Henry Grabar says no city in America can fill the bill) we suggest waiving all the requirements. By so doing, we can throw open the door to an otherwise deserving future home of Whole Washington Ama-Bezos Inc. and offer a dazzling array of landscapes and cityscapes from which to choose.

Among Mr. Bezos's 482 choices in California -- not counting unincorporated county land where he might build his city from scratch -- here is a sample of some hidden gems he might want to consider.

Taft

This small city in Kern County serves as a historic marker for the oil business that flourished here and in nearby Bakersfield decades ago. Tiny Taft has many points of interest, such as a number of working oil derricks. And the traffic court. Much of the town, sadly, has a kind of beaten-down look. A landscape ravaged by the oil business has never been repaired, and no new core business has moved in to fill the gap.

If the oil derricks of Taft symbolized 20th century industry, the same town could symbolize 21st Century business: a consumer economy in which every store in the world is owned by a single company. The derricks, with their non-stop pumping, could be made over as public art: with each pump decorated to depict the arm of an Amazon worker stuffing a book into an envelope over and over again. And no need to worry about CEQA suits. The land in

Taft isn't exactly pristine, and oil pumps don't file lawsuits.

Costa Mesa

This Orange County community is the home of the South Coast Plaza shopping center, a sprawling, high-end retail complex containing nearly 3 million square feet. Buying an existing building is much cheaper than new construction, so I suggest Mr. Bezos simply acquire the entire complex and occupy the space vacated by stores he has already put out of business. With the proverbial handwriting on the wall for brick-and-mortar retail, the current owners should exult in the chance to exchange their mortgages for shares of Amazon.

Why should Taft be left out of the Amazon sweepstakes?

And don't worry about displacing the remaining merchants: Bloomingdale's *et al* can stay in place and become on-site amenities for tech workers accustomed to nice things. ("No need to leave work for a day of mad, impulsive shopping," goes the recruitment brochure. "You can suppress your feelings of rage by overspending during lunch, and suppress your feelings of shame by over-achieving in the afternoon.") Amazon should also buy the nearby Orange County Center for the Performing Arts,

a great venue for Mr. Bezos to announce the release of, say, Kindle 17.3 or the acquisition of the German auto industry.

Santa Nella

This car-friendly tourist town in Merced County is the ultimate expression of freeway-oriented urbanism: Lots of fast food and cheap motel rooms, gasoline and impulse retail, with very little urban design to get in the way. It would be tacky and wrong to say that Santa Nella is a glorified pea-soup pit stop along Interstate 5, but a little bit of that DNA would show up if the town took a genealogy test. So why would Amazon locate here? With the *laissez-bon-temps-rouler* attitude toward freeway-oriented development in this city, the company could build here any which way it wanted, without so much as a dirty look, much less a protracted approval battle. As for the transit requirement, well, please observe Santa Nella is right on the freeway. If that's not enough, Mr. B. could buy a fleet

Amazon, Come Into Our Waiting Arms!

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of touristy charter buses to *shlepp* in folks from Los Banos. This service can be supplemented by high-speed rail, which is expected just in time to celebrate the retirement of your grandchildren.

Mendota

This Fresno County city is, regrettably, “the unemployment capital of California,” according to McClatchy News Service. At the height of the recent drought, joblessness hit 40 percent in a community heavily dependent on seasonal farm work. The poverty rate hovers around 60 percent. Here, the selling point for Amazon is a motivated workforce. Forget the sulky brats in Seattle or Silicon Valley, who interrogate you, during their own job interviews, about the number of ping-pong tables to be found on the barbecue deck with the ocean view. Folks in Mendota are willing to work, period. Any company should be willing to hire them, give them fair pay, and share the California dream.

Santa Monica

This ocean-front hub of tech and entertainment would be a common-sensical choice for Amazon’s HQ No. 2. Of course, the arrival of 50,000 workers to Santa Monica to a city with an inventory of 95,000 dwellings might make an already expensive housing market even more exclusive. Imagine a line of people standing on Wilshire Boulevard, wearing imported knit clothing and staring off in the distance like refugees. “I sold my home before realizing that I couldn’t afford anything else in Santa Monica, even after making a profit,” bewails Lindsay Gwyneth, a

personal assistant.

The hyperinflation of Santa Monica real estate would also bring about a cataclysmic eastward shift to the entire LA housing market. Downtown would become the new Culver City, East LA would be Larchmont and Victorville would be Riverside. While benefiting homeowners and investors, this eastward march in value may be less helpful for young renters in search of affordable digs. I hear there are some great saguaro catcti in the Arizona desert just waiting to be converted into Santa Monica’s newest bedroom community.

Dialogue overheard between two young non-homeowners in the high desert:

First Young Person: “Hey! I know a large saguaro cactus where you can live!”

Second Young Person: “Is this one of those co-housing situations where I have to share the cactus with eight other people?”

First Young Person: “Actually, you’ll be subletting from one of *nine* other tenants. She works at night.”

Second Young Person: “Done!”

San Francisco

Who are we kidding? Even Jeff Bezos can’t afford to live in San Francisco.

– MORRIS NEWMAN | OCT 2, 2017 ■

