

PLANNING HISTORY

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San Diego: Looking To The Future

By Lynne Carrier

Introduction: A Young City

San Diego has the location and the physical foundation in general for an important, perhaps a great city. Its people are awake to its needs, and are resolved to meet them. It stands, therefore, upon the threshold of a truly sound and far-reaching development; for, when to superb natural advantages and human enterprise are added a sound public policy and a comprehensive plan of action, who can doubt the outcome?

-- John Nolen, 1908 --

When City consultant John Nolen wrote these words — a preface to San Diego's first grand vision statement of the 20th century he sounded an enduring clarion call for good planning. He looked at a young city (population less than 40,000) with most of its growth ahead of it, and imagined what it could become.

With so much of the urban canvas still blank, this was no easy task. In his time, the heart of San Diego retail lay in the small area around Fifth and Broadway downtown. The first modern shopping center, built in Linda Vista, would not materialize for another 40 years.

In 1908, a home buyer could still purchase a lot and order a custom-built California bungalow from catalogues at a cost of a few thousand dollars. The era of mass-produced urban tract homes that would dramatically increase housing and forever change the suburban landscape was decades off. And with San Diego only beginning to emerge from its horse-and-buggy days, who could have predicted a society dependent on cars? When Nolen spoke of building wider highways, he was thinking of European-style boulevards, not the freeways that would become vital transportation arteries.

Still, in its broadest outline, the Nolen plan laid out guiding principles that have been echoed in succeeding plans, both official and unofficial. Against the backdrop of what Nolen considered San Diego's "permanent attractiveness beyond all other communities," he envisioned development of a civic center of downtown public buildings, more urban open space, parks and playgrounds and a bayfront with promenades and public amenities — all of them goals as valid today as when Nolen first wrote about them. At the top of the list? Building a city to capitalize on its many natural assets and climate.

"The scenery is varied and exquisitely beautiful," rhapsodized the landscape architect from Massachusetts. "The great, broad, quiet mesas, the picturesque canyons, the bold line of distant mountains, the wide hard ocean beaches, the great Bay, its beauty crowned by the islands of Coronado, the caves and coves of La Jolla, the unique Torrey Pines, the lovely Mission Valley, these are but some of the features of the landscape that should be looked upon as precious assets to be preserved and enhanced."



His emphasis on developing a functional and beautiful city, harmonizing with an equally beautiful natural setting, is a theme often repeated in the 14 other plans and studies discussed in this document. Some are official planning documents offering comprehensive guidelines for the entire City. Others represent the visions of the City's leaders and planning consultants, and although never officially adopted, they often influenced the shape of municipal and regional planning debates. Some are broad and general, while others focus more narrowly on neighborhood or economic issues. But collectively, the plans and reports offer a rich mosaic of visions expressed during the course of the City's 20th-century development.

Knowing what planners, City officials and civic leaders hoped would happen makes it easier to measure their goals against present realities and to measure which ideas materialized and which did not, which are still relevant and which are not. Examining their goals and strategies is a guide to where the City has been. As San Diego prepares to update its General Plan at the end of the 20th Century, the review is also meant to serve as useful background for those who will help determine where the City will go in the 21st century.

Most of the plans and reports discussed here were prepared during the past 25 years, a time of booming growth and occasional recessions, crumbling inner-city's infrastructure, traffic congestion and the need for downtown revitalization, neighborhood empowerment and new jobs.

Despite the diversity of challenges, virtually all the plans share some common visions: They seek to preserve the character of neighborhoods and decentralize services for them. They foster creation of employment and housing opportunities for all San Diegans. They take a regional perspective on a wide range of issues, from housing to public transportation, and treat Mexico's Baja California as an important element in the San Diego region. They support clear growth guidelines, development of a diverse economy, plenty of clean industry, an improved public transit system and well-maintained City services and structures.

San Diego's Planning Roots

City officials and civic leaders approach these goals through a planning process that has evolved from Nolen's earlier work, although few recognized its significance at the time his study first surfaced. More than a decade later, Nolen's planning skills would be tapped again when San Diego officials decided to pay the Boston consultant \$10,000 to draft a plan for the City, harbor and parks. Completed in 1926, the plan became a cornerstone of urban design and marked the advent of the City's official planning process. A Planning Department was formed, and Kenneth Gardner, a Nolen employee, was named its first Planning Director.

During the Depression years that followed, the tough economic times did nothing to diminish San Diego's civic pride. City leaders staged the Californian Pacific Exposition of 1935-36. It was a follow-up to the successful Panama-California Exposition of 1915-16, which gave Balboa Park its historic Spanish-Moroccan style architecture on the park's Prado. Along the downtown waterfront, a new civic center was built, a Works Project Administration project that remains a handsome jewel on the bay.

Meanwhile, the City's fledgling planning process entered its halcyon days. In 1931, voters approved a new council/manager form of government that allowed the Planning Department to



function separately from the City Manager. A zoning ordinance was approved. The Works Progress Administration funded a textbook on City planning for schools. But many of these efforts took place when development pressures on elected leaders were almost nonexistent.

Postwar Boom

It fell to the next generation to draw in the details of the plans that struggled to reconcile the desire to protect San Diego's environment and quality of life with the gritty realities of economic forces and rapid development. World War II and its aftermath had turned San Diego into a busy center for military bases and defense work. Starting in the 1950s, the “great, broad, quiet mesas” admired by John Nolen began to fill with factories, homes and highways, and the “lovely Mission Valley” turned so urban that some called it a second downtown.

The City responded but not without a struggle. Voters rejected the 1965 plan and the City had to come up with a new one. By 1967, the City had approved a Progress Guide and General Plan that included some of the fundamentals of the future growth management plan, from compact development to preserving open space. The City was not only looking to modernize its policies, it sought to democratize the planning processes as were established to give residents and others more of a voice. More than 40 of these groups currently exist.

Rapid growth in the 1950s and 1960s brought its share of civic amenities and landmarks to San Diego, among them the creation of Mission Bay Park, Sea World, a stadium, a sports arena and a new City Hall and Civic Theatre on a downtown community concourse. Such projects were applauded. The real growth debate moved to the suburbs, where thousands of tract homes, serviced by strip malls, were going up.

As growth accelerated, environmentalists argued urgently for more protections, from the coastline to the inland canyons and mesas, where bulldozers leveled mesa tops and filled canyons for housing. At the state and local level, voters showed their desire to protect their natural assets. During the 1970s, the California Coastal Commission was created to protect the coastline and push for development of local coastal programs from coastal communities, among them San Diego. In 1978, San Diegans passed a bond measure to raise money to acquire open space.

Pete Wilson, who was elected San Diego's mayor in 1971, hardly had a chance to warm his mayoral chair before the buyers of Mira Mesa tract homes were picketing City Hall. Their new subdivisions lacked schools and other public services. Wilson, who later went to the U.S. Senate and then became governor of California, put the City's planning issues at the top of his political agenda.

Growth Management and Redevelopment

For San Diego, 1975 proved to be a watershed year. The City Council adopted a growth management plan structured around the timing and location of development and a mechanism for shifting the public costs of building and installing public services to the developers. The same year, the council created the Centre City Development Corp., the City's downtown renewal arm.



These planning accomplishments stirred a measure of controversy, particularly over suburban development. Debate raged over whether the City should use its powers to slow growth or simply accommodate residential construction in a more orderly way.

Two sweeping planning visions from the 1970s — the unofficial *Temporary Paradise?* report and the City Council-approved Progress Guide and General Plan — reflected the nuances of the differing points of view. *Temporary Paradise?* published in 1974 by consultants Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard and funded through a grant from the Marston family, urged stronger environmental planning and offered ideas for balancing growth, new infrastructure and ecology.

The report advocated slowing, though not altogether halting, the rapid development of the inland suburbs. The consultants warned the City could not rely on zoning and subdivision control to “stem the tide of development.”

“Experience shows that those familiar devices are often impotent where development pressures are strong, and there is no established community to make a resistance,” noted the report.

Among the ideas for putting on the brakes, the report suggested controlling growth by having the City extend services gradually to outlying areas, not at the developers' request. Developers would then be forced to wait in areas still lacking public services. The report also recommended reducing the size of the subdivisions that any one developer could build. And new development would be expected to pay for all the public services it required, “not only the initial construction costs, but the running costs, and those more intangible losses of traffic, smog, wasted water, and so on.”

City officials did not include the report's most extreme development-slowing tactics in the City's growth management plan adopted five years later. Slow-growth opponents argued that restricting construction was an elitist idea that would boost housing prices beyond the means of less affluent San Diegans.

Nevertheless, the City's growth management plan did incorporate, in part, the idea of making new development pay for itself one of the concepts embraced by the *Temporary Paradise?* authors. In 1979, when the City Council adopted the new Progress Guide and General Plan, it incorporated the previously approved growth management requirement that developers pay fees in advance to cover the cost of installing parks, roads, branch libraries, schools and other services as a condition of project approval. At the time, City officials did not realize how crucial that requirement would become. They did not anticipate the eventual municipal budget fallout caused by Proposition 13, the statewide tax-cutting initiative approved by voters in 1978. Initially, the state was able to cushion the fiscal blow to local governments by distributing state budget surplus money. So during the 1979 debate on the general plan, no loud Proposition 13 warning bells went off.

In contrast to the growth “retardation” recommended in *Temporary Paradise?*, under the growth management philosophy of the General Plan, the goal was not so much to limit construction as to avoid “leapfrog” development and the cost of urban sprawl. On the recommendation of City consultant Robert Freilich, the growth management plan separated the City into three tiers: urbanized, planned urbanized and future urbanizing. Construction was encouraged in established



neighborhoods and suburban areas already undergoing development. Residential construction was to be discouraged in the future urbanizing area, the vacant land on the City's peripheries. The plan also called for the preservation of open space.

While not perfect, the growth management plan seemed to function. Its policies provided a framework for development through a recession in the late 1970s and early 1980s into a period of massive development in the mid-1980s when the number of building permits topped more than 15,000 a year, about triple the normal number.

Citizen Reactions

During the height of the development bonanza, the council was under increasing pressure to take stronger growth control action. Council actions viewed as unduly hastening development ran into trouble. For instance, the public strongly backed the growth management plan's concept of reserving vacant land for future development, so much so that voters rebelled when the City Council approved a religious organization's proposal for a university, thousands of homes and an industrial park in the future urbanizing area. In 1985, they passed a ballot measure, Proposition A, which not only rescinded the council's approval for the massive development proposal, it required a vote of the people for any early development at a higher density in the future urban zone.

Responding in part to the growing public outcry and the formation of grass-roots slow-growth groups like PLAN! (Prevent Los Angelization Now) the council acted in 1987 to impose a true growth limit, the Interim Development Ordinance. It allowed 8,000 new units citywide per year and lasted for about 18 months. The voters may have believed the restrictions had gone far enough. In 1988, voters faced two growth control ballot measures for the City and another two for the county. All four were strongly opposed by both the development industry and business community, and all four went down to defeat. But the voters did approve a countywide advisory measure, Proposition C, which encouraged cooperation in regional planning. In its aftermath, the San Diego Association of Governments, with 18 cities and the county as members, drafted and approved a regional plan that dealt with countywide economic and environmental issues ranging from housing to open space protection.

Meanwhile, in the older urban neighborhoods, the growth management plan worked a little too well, often filling up its vacant lots or replacing old homes with small, dense apartments and condos. That is what the plan intended, and as an incentive, developers in those neighborhoods were exempt from the fees imposed on suburban developers. But neighbors complained the new housing was poorly designed, created traffic and parking headaches, caused school overcrowding and overwhelmed an already deteriorating infrastructure. The City had little funding to shore up public services as Proposition 13 began to take its fiscal toll on local government revenues. While the vision of compact development took shape, its financial implications went slightly awry.

Recession Slowdown, “Business Friendly”

The era of growth management wound down at the turn of the decade as the supply of available raw land dwindled and San Diego's economy went into a tailspin. Slow-growth advocates finally got their wish: The recession nearly brought development to a standstill. But it also hit the



business community hard and cost workers tens of thousands of jobs. Many defense contractors downsized or left town, and the City struggled to diversify its economy.

In that atmosphere, Mayor Susan Golding took office in 1992, promising business-friendly policies. Planning regulations were deemed too numerous and onerous, and some were streamlined out of existence. Community planning group leaders were dismayed, fearing that neighborhood planning would suffer.

Golding countered with measures aimed at helping neighborhoods revitalize and noted that the City had to act to boost its employment base and help diversify the economy. Between 1990 and 1993, the local economy lost 58,500 jobs, she noted.

“Over the past several years, the mayor and City Council have reshaped City Hall into a partner to progress rather than an obstacle,” she said in “Charting a Course for the 21st Century,” her 1996 economic plan. “Many regulations and policies that have impeded progress have been eliminated. Onerous fees and taxes have been slashed. Our permit processing systems have been overhauled and streamlined to reflect a new business friendly attitude at City Hall.”

During the 1990s, City planning grew less and less visible. In 1991, the Planning Department and the Planning Director, previously an official who answered directly to the City Council, were moved under the City Manager's control. In 1994, as an early step in business center restructuring, the Planning Department was divided in two, with all permit-related activities going to the Development Services Department. The Planning Department continued to update community plans and do other traditional planning functions, as well as some major citywide projects such as the Naval Training Center reuse and zoning code update. Two years later, the Planning Department lost its separate identity altogether during a City government restructuring. To assemble functions critical to neighborhood development, the City Manager consolidated planning, economic development, redevelopment, community services and code enforcement into a new Community and Neighborhood Services Business Center along with library and park and recreation functions.

But in the mid-1990s, the economy began to surge and, with it, demand for housing. Recognizing the need to prepare for the coming wave of development, the City's planning functions were again reorganized. A new Planning and Development Review Department was created in 1998, combining the former Development Services Department with Community Planning and Development. The department has a director and two assistant directors, one for current development planning and review and a City Planner who oversees long-range community planning and the Multiple Species Conservation Program. The City Planner ~ the first true long-range planning leader for the City since the previous planning director resigned in 1996 ~ has a voice in the City Manager's policy-making machinery and sits in on high-level meetings. Under the new consolidated planning effort, the City is poised to deal equally with its present and the future.

Despite the shrinking of the City planning structure, this decade was not a replay of the early 20th century smokestacks-versus-geraniums debate with smokestacks alone winning out. The leaders of the 1990s argued for both economic growth and beauty. They continued to dream and plan. In the mayor's economic plan, for instance, she noted that even while the City was



pursuing its pro-business policies, it was working on plans for the “most far reaching and innovative habitat preservation program in the United States. We are showing that aggressive economic development and environmental protection are not incompatible objectives.”

Other concepts in the 1990s, such as the proposed downtown government building district and bayfront plan, were modern-day versions of enduring ideas expressed in the Nolen plan at the start of the century. Still other planners continued to build on the earlier success of downtown redevelopment, hoping to spread revitalization into the blighted sections of Centre City East.

While the recession knocked suburban developers for a loop, some residential developers continued to build or renovate, although projects were smaller in scale and fewer in number. The best of these projects — some completed with redevelopment subsidies or low-income housing assistance — were widely praised for setting a high standard for quality affordable housing in older neighborhoods. A notable example is the Mercado apartment complex in Barrio Logan, a handsome, well-maintained development that transcends the barrio's bleak warehouses, machine shops and junkyards.

Where Are We Now?

San Diego has grown from a small town to a City of 1.2 million people living in 42 communities sprawled across the City's 325 square miles. The City — the sixth largest in the nation — is the urban centerpiece of a county where the burgeoning population exceeds 2.8 million. More than 1 million people live across the border in Tijuana, Mexico.

After a severe five-year recession, the loss of thousands of defense-related jobs and the fiscal noose imposed by Proposition 13, San Diego has bounced back economically. In a matter of a few years, it went from a City heavily dependent on military and defense spending to one that is far more diversified. While defense is still an important part of the economy -- San Diego has been designated as a Navy megaport — high technology companies also are booming. Job openings for engineers totaled more than 2,500 in late 1997, according to one survey. Bioscience companies are proliferating, with about 250 them operating in the region. San Diego is no longer viewed as a cul-de-sac on the far edge of the nation; it has become a trading power on the frontline of the Pacific Rim.

As City officials prepare to update the General Plan, the strengthening economy may well reignite some of the past planning debates that traditionally emerged in boom cycles. Already the region's economic and corporate leaders have expressed concern over whether San Diego will be able to generate enough affordable housing to serve the workforce they need.

Meanwhile, the City's infrastructure demands repair and expansion to keep up with the expected growth.

Where Do We Grow From Here?

San Diego has its share of residents who wish the City would stay the way it is, as evidenced in the 1980s by the bumper stickers that read, “Welcome to San Diego Now Go Home.” During the depth of the recession in the early 1990s, when local jobs were scarce, people actually began



moving away from San Diego. But once the economy improved, the population began to grow again, and analysts predict that trend will continue.

The San Diego Association of Governments, the regional planning body, forecasts that countywide, the population will grow from 2.7 million in 1995 to 3.8 million in 2020, a 43 percent increase. The housing stock is expected to rise from 996,700 homes to 1.4 million, a 41 percent increase.

Where will those new homes go, especially as the last large undeveloped tracts fill up? What is the City of San Diego's fair share of the new homes? How much housing should be produced in the North County, where many of the high tech and biotech employees work? How will the City pay to extend public services? Fix and expand its existing infrastructure? How can the development be accomplished without destroying too much of San Diego's treasured open space? These old questions are likely to figure prominently in the current round of planning debates.

Have the past policies and strategies addressing these growth issues made a difference in shaping the City into its present form? The authors of the 15 plans described above suggest the City is evolving along the lines of a common vision, despite the mistakes, oversights and some unforeseen consequences.

The Progress Guide and General Plan, passed nearly two decades ago, clearly had an impact on development patterns, reflected in master planned communities like North City West (now Carmel Valley), the slower development on the City's outer edges, the dense apartment projects squeezed into older central neighborhoods and the success of redevelopment, particularly downtown.

Updated in 1992, with new Guidelines for Future Development only, the General Plan continues to emphasize the preservation of valleys, canyons and open space throughout the City, one of the most universal goals in plans going back to the early part of the century.

As Adele Santos noted, the job of protecting enough open space for the future is far from complete. Even so, she acknowledges progress. The Multiple Species Conservation Program is designed to ensure that large tracts will remain undeveloped. And over the years, open space has been acquired and protected through deals with developers as well as through public purchases. One notable example is the regional park in Penasquitos Canyon. Another is Mission Trails Regional Park in the East County. Both are large natural oases surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

Some of the City's other past visions and goals have not materialized yet, but they still reappear in plan after plan. In 1908, John Nolen talked of the importance of connecting San Diego to the rest of the country through the San Diego & Arizona Eastern rail line. In the 1980s, a storm washed out the tracks and shut down the freight service between San Diego and Plaster City. But rebuilding the line turned up as one of the goals in the Mayor's 1996 strategic economic plan.

While some of the plans took time to succeed or fell by the wayside, others became a reality in short order. Often those were the visions and goals with broad political support, an implementing plan and a financing mechanism.



Downtown redevelopment -- a legacy of Wilson's mayoral tenure -- was the most visible example. In the 15 years after the Centre City Development Corp. was established all three of the proposed main projects -- Horton Plaza shopping center, the downtown convention center and the Marina housing district -- were built. The historic Gaslamp Quarter was renovated and turned into a vibrant center for dining and entertainment. New single room occupancy hotels were built with such quality that they earned awards and national admiration. The number of residents living downtown grew from a few hundred in the 1970s to more than 20,000 in 1998. More than 4,250 downtown units have been built with the help of redevelopment subsidies. But not all goals have benefited from solid political backing, and, in the plans examined, some appear to be headed in different directions. For instance, developers like pro-business measures that cut regulations. But community activists may view these same regulations as important tools to maintain the quality of their neighborhoods. One specific example occurred after the General Plan of 1979 included support for development of balanced communities, with housing to accommodate all different socioeconomic levels to be scattered throughout the City. Attempts at implementing the concept drew heated arguments and opposition from those who said land in high-income neighborhoods was too expensive for affordable housing projects.

Are there new, better ways to achieve balanced housing? And what about issues that haven't been addressed in past reports? With the recent emphasis on improving neighborhoods and decentralizing services, what is the future vision for downtown? Does San Diego see itself becoming a collection of neighborhoods or a City where residents from all neighborhoods have a single place where they can gather? How far should the City go in dismantling development regulations in its quest to increase the affordable housing stock? How much say should neighborhood leaders have in the City's land use decision-making process?

Other questions undoubtedly will continue to swirl over which of the numerous proposed individual civic projects should be pursued as part of a larger comprehensive plan, whether it is a new City Hall, a better library system or a downtown ballpark.

According to Nolen, the most certain thing about planning is that it is a continuous process that must constantly adapt as a City grows.

“The emphasis needs to be placed less on the original plan and more on the replanning or remodeling,” he wrote. “The beautiful cities of Europe, the cities that are constantly taken as illustrations of what modern cities should be, are practically without exception the result of a picturesque, accidental growth, regulated, it is true, by considerable common sense and respect for art, but improved and again improved to fit changed conditions and new ideas.”

A Brief Look at San Diego's Plans

Much of the City's development, large and small, or only in the proposal stage has been influenced, at least in part, by the forward thinking of planners, civic leaders and City officials.

The following is a synopsis of past reports and plans that helped give the City direction and set the stage for the next round of general planning. Not all of the City's many past studies are



listed, of course, but it is a representative sampling that offers a broad portrait of where citizens and planners hope to lead San Diego.

They are divided into three categories: approved plans that serve as official policy guides, conceptual reports that offer visions but are not adopted and economic reports that focus on the business side of the growth debate.

Approved Plans

- ***Progress Guide and General Plan (Plan) (1979)***. The document refined the City guidelines for growth management first adopted by the City Council four years earlier. The Guidelines for Future Development portion of the Plan was amended as recently as 1992, and the Plan is still considered sound and viable in its principles. It is the operating vision for the City of San Diego. According to the Plan, it was designed to offer a comprehensive strategy to respond to public concerns over growth, housing density and development patterns and environmental protection.

Its basic goal is a single statement -- the “fostering of a physical environment in San Diego that will be most congenial to healthy human development.” In reality, the Plan included a complex framework of policies addressing issues ranging from new housing and redevelopment to land conservation and social concerns such as encouraging balanced communities offering housing for all income levels.

The Plan's growth management guidelines spelled out a system for phasing in residential construction. It encouraged “in-filling” or building on vacant lots in older neighborhoods and tried to direct the bulk of new development to suburbs like Mira Mesa, where development already was underway. Developers paid fees to cover the cost of installing public services and help provide classrooms, and they had to show that the City had enough water and sewer capacity for the new subdivisions. Master plans for the large new communities ~ for example, North City West (now Carmel Valley) -- were encouraged. However, the vacant outer fringes of the City, the future urbanizing area, were earmarked for development in future decades when needed. The three-tier system -- urbanized, planned urbanized and future urbanizing -- was designed to provide enough housing to meet the demands of a growing population, while reducing the public cost of extending public services to the suburbs.

Hardly limited to housing, the Plan encouraged development of employment centers near residential areas, mass transit alternatives for the new communities and preservation of open space that could not only protect natural features but also serve as a buffer between developments.

For urban areas, the Plan cites the need for public and private reinvestment, although the City was caught off guard by the extent of development in older neighborhoods, resulting in overcrowded schools and overburdened public services. Redevelopment was considered a valuable tool for blighted areas of downtown and some urban neighborhoods.



As the amount of developable land dwindles, as the City's economy and culture change and as the older urbanized communities face serious public facility and infrastructure deficiencies, the City Council sees a need to update the 1979 plan again. The goal is to add a strategic framework element, update the existing elements and develop an implementation program.

- ***Regional Growth Management Strategy (1993)*** In 1988, voters approved an advisory measure calling on local government to prepare a regional growth plan. Five years later, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), made up of the region's 18 cities and the county, delivered a regional strategy to deal with traffic jams, overcrowded schools and other impacts of the rapid development of the 1980s. The strategy concentrated primarily on nine environmental and economic factors: air quality, transportation systems, water, sewage treatment, sensitive land and open space protection, solid waste, hazardous waste, housing, and economic prosperity.

SANDAG's regional plan, adopted by the board and individual member jurisdictions, tried to integrate different elements into its recommendations. For instance, its suggested land use policies called for the highest density of housing to go up near community centers and public transit stations. Similarly, libraries, civic buildings, urban parks, hospitals, and churches would be near transit stops.

For the most part, SANDAG does not have the power to impose land use policies on its member jurisdictions and relies on them to comply voluntarily. Twice since 1993, SANDAG's members have certified that they are making progress on the quality-of-life factors in the strategy.

As residential growth slowed and agencies grew more alarmed about the flagging economy, SANDAG concentrated on its regional economic prosperity strategy, the strategy, approved in 1995, urged education, business and labor to cooperate in the effort to revive the economy. It also advocated investing in small start-up companies and training workers so they could meet the demands of the workplace. A SANDAG committee, chaired by San Diego City Councilwoman Christine Kehoe, will update the regional economic prosperity strategy in 1998.

Consolidated Plan (1997) The San Diego Housing Commission, the City's Community and Economic Development Department, the County Office of AIDS Coordination and the Regional Task Force on the Homeless collaborate to produce a comprehensive community development plan. Required annually by the federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD), the current plan's goals include providing decent housing, expanding economic opportunities and making neighborhoods safer and more livable.

Originally approved by the federal government in September 1997, the document's emphasis is on coordinating and integrating the City's affordable housing programs with the neighborhood revitalization and partnership concepts embodied in the Livable Neighborhoods Initiative and the Renaissance Commission.



One of the Plan's main priorities is to increase the amount of affordable housing for low-income households and preserve the existing housing stock. The Plan includes programs for the homeless and extension of human services to those who need them.

Conceptual Reports

- ***The Nolen Plan (1908)*** The granddaddy of San Diego's urban studies, John Nolen's Comprehensive Plan for San Diego, signaled a wakeup call for a City in search of a vision. Nolen chided the City for having a plan that “is not thoughtful, but, on the contrary, ignorant and wasteful.” He winced at the narrow, monotonous City streets, some of which had destroyed scenic canyons and valleys, and criticized the small size of downtown blocks, shortened to create more corner lots to sell to businesses. He attributed the mistakes of the past to “a low standard of City making, a disregard of the future, and a lack of civic pride.”

In Nolen's view, the City needed a plan that would provide the impetus for “a great system of parks well connected by boulevards,” a plaza to serve as a centerpiece for well-designed public buildings and a “broad esplanade” on the waterfront. He offered ten specific recommendations, including preservation of beaches and other open space for the public, increasing the number of small squares “to open, ventilate, and beauty the City,” and creation of a “Paseo” connecting the bay and Balboa Park. He envisioned a civic center around a plaza formed on the bounded by Broadway (then still called D Street), C and Front streets and First Avenue. At the time, civic leaders did not accept this proposal, but Nolen's second plan proposed a bayfront civic center, which eventually led to the construction of the County Administration Center. As for neighborhoods, Nolen recommended wider, more varied street configurations, but mostly he concentrated on public spaces, structures and infrastructure.

Nolen's first study was not commissioned by the City. He was hired by the Civic Improvement Committee, a group of downtown business leaders, led by department store founder George W. Marston. The City hired Nolen in the 1920s for another study that would lead to a master plan.

- ***Temporary Paradise? (1974)*** Widely heralded as the forward-thinking document of its time, this unofficial report by consultants Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard is still valued by environmentalists and community leaders.

It bears some striking parallels to the first Nolen plan. For instance, both studies came about with help from the Marston family, which provided a \$12,000 grant for *Temporary Paradise?* Both advocated City plans that preserve the beaches, valleys, canyons, bays and other natural resources for all San Diegans. And like Nolen, Lynch and Appleyard were not reluctant to point out past planning failures. They harshly criticized the urbanization of Mission Valley in the 1950s, saying it had become “a chaos of highways, parking lots, and scattered commercial buildings. The City should erect an historic monument to that tragic event. It struck a double blow: one directed both at the landscape and at the economy of the center City.”



But unlike the Nolen plan, which had little to say about housing issues, *Temporary Paradise?* focused heavily on the problems associated with rapid residential development such as pollution, traffic jams and overextended public services. As noted previously, the report suggested ways that municipal government could slow growth, particularly for the inland suburbs.

Growth would be funneled into existing neighborhoods, a key concept incorporated later into the City's growth management plan. At the same time, the City would help restore and improve the character of the City's various communities.

The report's transportation goals foreshadowed the plans and actions of the City and the region, from improving bus service pedestrian walkways, and bike paths to building a fixed rail system. *Temporary Paradise?* advocated a fixed rail line from Tijuana to Mission Bay. Seven years later, when the Metropolitan Transit Development Board opened the first leg of the San Diego Trolley, the line operated between the U.S.-Mexico border and downtown San Diego.

Temporary Paradise? also was among the first reports to view Tijuana as part of the San Diego region. The report urged stronger ties with Mexican neighbors and the creation of binational institutions such as training centers or a university. The report also favored relocating Lindbergh Field to a new international airport on Otay Mesa to help stimulate the border economy while freeing Lindbergh land for urban development. The City Council actually pursued the possibility of an Otay Mesa airport, but the proposal died after South Bay and Tijuana leaders opposed it.

One of the plan's more visionary ideas was to finish developing Mission Bay and create a waterway to connect it to San Diego Bay. The bay-to-bay link is still a popular concept and is carried as a vision in the North Bay Revitalization Plan.

The centerpiece of *Temporary Paradise?* is its comprehensive environmental plan to be developed by a special environmental planning and design section in the City's Planning Department. Among other activities, the section would make recommendations on urgent issues, ranging from surveying urban and rural areas to determining their future growth capacity and reclaiming San Diego Bay for public use. Policies would be put in place to conserve water and other natural resources.

- ***Alternative Futures for San Diego (1987)*** As slow-growth campaigns sought caps on development (initiatives ultimately rejected by voters), the City Council authorized an updating of the City's growth management program and General Plan review. A City Council appointed Citizens Advisory Committee on Growth and Development worked with Planning Department staff to generate the Alternative Futures report. Defining vision as "an expression of our highest aspirations," the report repeats many of the goals in *Temporary Paradise?* and the 1979 General Plan.

Advisory committee members wanted balanced communities with housing opportunities for all socioeconomic levels and properly funded public services. Older neighborhoods would be revitalized, while retaining their special character and history. Services and recreational amenities would be distributed equitably to various parts of the City.



Canyons, river valleys and lagoons would be preserved, the air and water would be clean, and environmentally sensitive habitats would be protected. San Diego would have programs to reduce dependency on gas, oil and imported water, and the City budget would have enough funding to provide public services and facilities throughout the City. The sewer system would be dependable, environmentally friendly and equipped for recycling.

The county's future transportation system would have a regional airport that could meet air traffic demand, freight rail line services, public support for mass transit and countywide commuter rail service. Regional and local transit systems would be integrated.

As for the economy, the committee envisioned enough new jobs and housing to accommodate the population, with opportunities for a range of skill levels. Basic industries among them, manufacturing, tourism, aerospace, fishing and ship building -- would flourish and increase their payrolls. The City would have first-rate educational and cultural institutions.

The report discussed the pros and cons of several conceptual alternatives for managing growth without endorsing any particular alternative. Although the General Plan review was never completed, the Alternative Futures report was formally accepted by the City Council in March 1987. The growth management project did lead to several new regulatory measures, including the Single Family Protection Program, the adoption of facility financing fees for the urbanized communities, the Interim Development Ordinance (IDO), the Resource Protection Ordinance and a program to bring zoning into conformance with adopted community plans.

- ***Action Plan-Urban Form Workshop (November 1991)*** Facilitated by Partners for Livable Places, the workshop gathered more than 400 people from the community to help chart a course for the City's future. The resulting report, prepared by the City of San Diego and other community organizations, noted that despite their differences, various interest groups shared most of the same common goals expressed during the previous 50 years. Among the key features of this officially adopted vision were open space conservation and access, neighborhood preservation, a comprehensive transportation system, regional planning, adequate social services and public facilities and economic development.

The workshop's report urged the City to update its Progress Guide and General Plan but not replace it entirely. The changes would merely “build on the solid policy foundation of the existing plan” by adding recommendations from the report. For instance, the report favored a utility tax of two percent on industrial and commercial property and one percent on residential property to help pay for infrastructure repairs in older neighborhoods. It also proposed a “compact” with a selected community. The “laboratory” neighborhood would be offered new parks, schools, libraries or other improvements in exchange for allowing a higher density of homes.

With the economy heading into the doldrums in the early 1990s, the report recommended a “coherent marketing and business plan” and the examination of the current impediments to permit processing, and irrational regulations for development.” The report said that “the City needs to make the review process accessible and user-friendly to encourage new



development opportunities,” striking a tone in sharp contrast to some of the growth-limiting strategies recommended in the earlier *Temporary Paradise?* Nevertheless, on environmental issues, the Urban Form report praised *Temporary Paradise?* for warning San Diegans that they should take strong action to create a greenbelt of sensitive lands. To achieve the goal, the workshop recommended creation of a regional nonprofit land trust to buy open space with funds from an open space bond issue.

The Urban Form action report was formally accepted by the City Council in November 1991.

- ***Vision and Implementing Principles for the City of San Diego (1992)*** Drafted by the Partnership for San Diego, the document offered a straightforward vision statement and implementing principles in a dozen different areas, including education, economic opportunities, safe and attractive neighborhoods, environmental resources, mass transit, and affordable housing.

The report included a three-paragraph basic vision statement that said, in part, “We seek to establish a dynamic, progressive, binational, Pacific Rim community that celebrates its ethnic and cultural diversity while promoting a diverse economic base and a high quality of life for all.”

The Partnership, a group made up of many of those who participated on the Urban Form and Economic Development Task Force studies, hoped that the City would use the report as a policy guide. Eventually, the group wanted its vision as the official guiding statement for the Progress Guide and General Plan.

The partnership proposed that a citizens committee issue an annual report card on how well Planning Commission and City Council actions and policies measured up to the Partnership visions. The committee also would have reviewed the principles periodically and make any needed changes. The City Council, however, never approved the vision program, despite support from then Councilman John Hartley, who had helped organize the Partnership study.

- ***Livable Neighborhoods Initiative (1994)*** As the City's older communities fought blight and a deteriorating infrastructure, Mayor Golding called on the City to focus on neighborhoods. The result was the Livable Neighborhoods Initiative, which targeted a dozen neighborhoods -- all but Mira Mesa located in the older sections of the City -- for special municipal attention.

The City created interdepartmental teams to work with the communities to come up with revitalization programs tailored to their needs. The teams established close communications with community leaders, responding to problems and helping them obtain neighborhood improvements. (During fiscal 1996, each team had \$17,000 in community block-grant funding.) In Centre City East, for instance, the program resulted in planting 600 trees. The effort is now evolving from a pilot project to an institutionalized program, using Livable Neighborhood principles in the City's day-to-day business.



A related neighborhood effort involves creating community and neighborhood service centers. These centers are part of a broad commitment to provide more customized staff and services that meet the needs of different communities.

- ***Renaissance Commission Report (1996)*** In her first inaugural speech, Mayor Golding described San Diego as “a City of neighborhoods” and said San Diego should take the lead to “restore and preserve its human scale.” Among other initiatives, she formed the Renaissance Commission, a group of community and business leaders asked to study ways to protect newer communities and revitalize the older ones. She asked the group to pinpoint problems that crossed community boundaries and identify methods of improving the delivery of City services to the communities.

The commission responded with five major recommendations. It said the City should restore public trust in the neighborhoods by decentralizing services and giving people better access to them. The commission wanted neighborhoods to have a stronger voice at City Hall on matters affecting them. For older crime-ridden neighborhoods, the City should create a neighborhood revitalization superfund. Businesses should join the partnership of City and neighborhood, said the commission. And for young people and seniors, the community's gyms, churches and community centers ought to be opened for after-school activities and other community programs.

Although the City Council accepted the commission's report and passed its recommendations to the council's committees, only one -- the decentralized community service centers -- has materialized so far. The superfund received a small amount of funding for one year.

- ***Towards Permanent Paradise (1995)*** Citizens Coordinate for Century 3 has begun a campaign to revive the main visions and ideas contained in the 1974 report, *Temporary Paradise?* Since the year it appeared, notes the civic group, the region's population has surged from 1.5 million to more than 2.5 million, and many have sealed in sprawling coastal and inland suburbs rather than the compact communities recommended by *Temporary Paradise?* authors Lynch and Appleyard.

The C-3 project aims to develop an implementation plan for the principles. “This strategy will include principles and public policy recommendations that strike an effective balance between the built and the natural environment,” states C-3 in its literature.

C-3 has set up a subcommittee to complete the implementation plan by spring 1998 for use by the organization in developing policy positions on issues.

- ***San Diego Grand Design (1997)*** Prepared by Adele Naude Santos and Associates and Andrew Spurlock Martin Poirier Landscape Architects, the Citylinks document explores a vision of San Diego in which an open space system connects San Diego's communities. Intended as an educational tool rather than an action plan, the report offers a framework to help guide the community planning process.

Noting that the linked open space concept has existed since the days of John Nolen, the authors say, “The existing parks, accessible open spaces and dedicated bike routes form the beginning of such a system but are neither complete, nor evenly distributed through the



City.” The report proposes a system that uses natural features as landmarks for navigating around the functional part of the City. Valleys, for instance, would form a web connecting communities. Projects like the proposed bay-to-bay link are favored as a means of connecting urban areas.

“We propose to strengthen the existing pattern of San Diego as a City of neighborhoods, in which neighborhoods are well defined, each with a distinctive character and sharing amenities in common,” stated the report.

Economic Reports

- ***City of San Diego Economic Development Task Force Report (December 1991)*** Like the Urban Form report issued the previous month, the task force also reflected San Diego's economic slump. It offered a grim prognosis for the future unless the City acted quickly and formed a public-private partnership to help with the recovery. With construction virtually at a standstill, San Diego would have to create a more inviting business environment, the report stated, and that meant cutting regulations and speeding up the processing of permits. The task force did not call for the wholesale elimination of environmental rules many developers felt were too onerous, but its report did recommend that the City “develop a reasonable, balanced approach to clarify and simplify current environmental regulations and related requirements.”

Two task force recommendations echoed common themes: Revitalizing urban communities and supporting improved communications between San Diego and Mexico.

To help San Diego improve its economy, the task force urged that the City designate a site for an international airport and speed up its construction. It called on the City to leverage public investment in order to build key infrastructure projects and establish the City as a leader in the promoting and a well-educated, skilled workforce for local industry. And it called for citywide incentives and programs to increase the supply of affordable housing.

This report was formally accepted by the City Council in January 1992.

- ***CHANGE 2 Report (1994)*** At the behest of Mayor Golding, a task force of business leaders examined City work practices to recommend ways to make them more efficient and competitive. The group, Citizens to Help Advocate Needed Government Efficiency & Effectiveness (CHANGE 2), came up with recommendations in June 1994. During the same period, the City Manager embarked on a similar effort called the Streamlining and Efficiency Program (STEP), which sifted through about 3,000 suggestions. Recommendations from both the task force and the City Manager's program were sent to City Council committees. Some have been put into effect.

One suggestion put into effect allowed the City to speed up its capital improvement program through better cash management. Another recommendation led to a program improving City competitiveness on projects. Still another urged City departments to buy supplies where they could get the lowest prices.



- *Charting a Course for the 21st Century (1996)* Citing post-Cold War defense cutbacks and the recession, Mayor Golding led an effort to plan for future economic prosperity with a comprehensive plan to “mobilize the City of San Diego's powers, authorities, and resources into the catalyst for change that is needed.” The resulting strategy, approved by the City Council, focused on supporting six industry clusters: telecommunications; biomedical, biotechnology and life sciences companies; electronics manufacturing; defense and space manufacturing; software; and financial and business services.

The plan laid out ambitious goals for economic growth, including creation of 5,000 new direct jobs a year in the six targeted industry clusters. In the restructured economy, the goal was to make sure San Diego residents “post steady and sustainable annual improvements.” The City Manager was instructed to work with the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp. to retain, expand or recruit new companies in these fields. Progress in implementing the plan was to be monitored closely, and a council of economic advisors was to convene once a year to review what had been done and take any corrective actions.

The strategy incorporated a broad range of actions that public agencies could take to complete infrastructure projects that could help the targeted industries. For instance, San Diego & Arizona Eastern Rail line leading east would be repaired and reopened, the port would upgrade its maritime facilities along San Diego Bay, and efforts would continue to secure the region's water supplies.

Other goals involve forming private-public partnerships to take the lead in developing San Diego's “new economy,” expanding the City's legislative program to lobby more vigorously at the state and federal level for San Diego's important industries. Schools would be encouraged to offer apprentice and other training program to prepare a skilled workforce.

The City Council adopted the 21st-century report in September 1997, directing the manager to come back with an implementation plan in 90 days. The council adopted the implementation plan in January 1998.

