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Address climate change through land use

By Hing Wong

As the state of California leads the nation in its efforts to set tougher emission standards for cars and trucks sold in the state with its lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), other less obvious alternatives for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and addressing climate change challenges should be considered.

The state's lawsuit against the EPA is an example of the steps being taken to reach a statewide goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020. The goal was established under landmark legislation, the Global Warming Solutions Act (Assembly Bill 32), adopted in late 2006.

Achieving these goals will require state and local governments to do more than tighten emission standards for cars and trucks. It will require an integrated effort from state, regional and local governments that considers how community and land-use planning policy decisions can help.

To guide local government agencies in planning-related decisions that respond to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, the American Planning Association's California chapter has published its recommended policy principles for climate change response.

City and county governments have the ability and opportunity to help California achieve these goals because they are the agencies responsible for creating local community land planning policy. Many cities and counties in Northern California have already done so with impressive results, and even more are following their lead.

For example, Marin County's Sustainability Program has become a national model demonstrating how planners can reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. The results earned Marin County the 2008 National Planning Excellence Award for Implementation from the American Planning Association. Through the program, greenhouse-gas emissions in public buildings were reduced by 100 tons during a five-year period. Energy-effi-



MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle 2004

Fruitvale station is touted as an example of how land use can reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

ciency measures in the program resulted in nearly 2 million kilowatt hours of energy being saved between 2006 and 2007, and energy conservation measures prevented 1,000 tons of carbon dioxide from being generated.

North Beach in San Francisco is another award-winning example. With the help of planning and zoning tools as well as citizen participation, North Beach remains a favorite among both residents and tourists, who enjoy the compact layout that encourages walking. North Beach's walk-ability also discourages automobile use and helps reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. In 2007, North Beach was selected as one of 10 great neighborhoods through the American Planning Association's "Great Places in America" program.

In Oakland, Fruitvale Village demonstrates how infill development, where new land uses are created on sites previously used for another purpose such as manufacturing, can encourage economic revitalization and the use of mass transit. Built on former Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) parking lots next to the Fruitvale BART sta-

tion, the transit village combines dozens of mixed-income homes, shops and restaurants, office space and community services such as a library, clinic and senior center. The resulting neighborhood allows residents to walk or use public transit for their regular recreation-, work- or school-related commutes. Ultimately, that creates less reliance on automobiles and reduces greenhouse-gas emissions.

With these examples as models, several cities in the region, including San Jose and Richmond, are now in the process of revising their general plans, which serve as blueprints for guiding future growth and development. The discussions on these new general plans have included increased focus on incorporating mixed land uses, infill, higher density and transit-oriented development.

On a broader scale, regional organizations such as the Association of Bay Area Governments, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Bay Area Conservation and Development Commis-

sion, have joined forces implementing the program Focus Our Vision. The committee's goals include encouraging future growth near transit, infill development, mixed-land uses and promoting conservation efforts through partnerships with local governments and community groups, all of which will help reduce vehicle use and greenhouse gas emissions.

As a professional planner who follows these issues, I can safely say that Northern California just may be the epicenter for innovative land planning policies that can help achieve reduced greenhouse-gas emissions. The challenge of climate change is global, but it will require local solutions. Land-use planning efforts can be one more opportunity for Californians to lead the way.

Hing Wong is the vice president of administration for the American Planning Association, California chapter, senior regional planner with the Association of Bay Area Governments, and treasurer of the California Planning Foundation.