Blueprint
for a Sustainable Bay Area

Submitted by Urban Ecology, Oakland
Urban Ecology, a Bay Area environmental advocacy group formed in 1973, has played a significant role in maintaining a green dialogue by fostering positive steps to pass through literature, conferences, and community participation. Its most recent project, a book called Blueprint for a Sustainably Bay Area, stands out as one of the most attractive and user-friendly compendiums of research and guidelines meant to help nurture the region's ecological heritage.

Blueprint was released in December, 1996. It covers human interaction with the physical environment on four different levels: the home, neighborhoods, cities and the region. The topics covered at each level are: the greenbelt, bay and estuary; jobs and industry; transportation and land use, materials, water and energy conservation; and regional planning and revenue sharing. The final chapter outlines appropriate roles for various participants and useful tools to use to reach the goals. Each chapter contains recommendations for action and illustrated case studies that are positive examples of local communities and organizations that are taking steps to move towards long-term sustainability.

The process of defining the issues, debating solutions and writing the book was highly collaborative. Urban Ecology reached out to many community-based and environmental organizations, representatives of local, regional, state and federal government, and the business and academic communities. During 1995, ten vision forums were organized around the main topics of the book. At the forums, advisors with a range of expertise provided the conceptual framework during morning panel discussions. Afternoon events included bus and walking tours and planning workshops. More than three hundred people participated, including forty advisors.

The book was written by a team of nine within Urban Ecology. Drafts were reviewed by the advisors, professional writers, and members of a concern focus group. The focus groups met four times, and each time the group was given exercises that stimulated discussion. The process resulted in some interesting results. For example, the group sent a clear message that the book needed to find a compelling alternative to the American Dream of a single-family detached home in the car-dependent suburbs, before they would be willing to move. On the other hand, after doing an exercise in which group members recorded the number of amenities in their urban neighborhoods within a quarter mile radius (such as grocery store, park, school, etc.), they realized that most of their daily needs could be met by walking instead of driving.

Blueprint's attractive graphics and a conscientious tone ensure that the many layers of information packed in the book remain readable and quite pleasurable.
sure to read, a quality that many of the other research entries that presented in-depth and meaningful research simply lacked. The use of graphics, images, diagrams, and fact boxes also make the book accessible, and the extensive glossary of terminology and bibliography at the end is equally helpful. Blueprint is an exercise in participatory reading. It urges readers to take action. How-to lists and checklists provide intermittent points of assessment for the reader. Each chapter is filled with recommendations for action, a capstone that could accompany any research project that includes empirical findings and criticisms. For example, the concluding chapter outlines the appropriate roles that various participants can take, and the useful tools needed to reach identified goals. Here, the tried and true methods gleaned from community participation meetings are offered for the taking—photographs of community participants in town meetings are juxtaposed with examples of the environmental report cards produced at these meetings. Meanwhile, other illustrations of case studies reaffirm that positive steps taken by local communities and organizations can enriching end results.

Readers, of course, are encouraged to interact at every scale, but this method leaves the possibility open for concerted efforts to be aimed at specific areas; you can concentrate on advocacy in your home, and if you want, you can get involved at the city scale. At least at the level of awareness-building, this method helps clarify the map—it deciphers how different layers of infrastructure work and influence each other.

Finally, Blueprint is an example of the transformation from research document to paradigm. Although the kernel of the idea for Blueprint was to create a comprehensive regional plan to redirect the Bay Area’s development course, the book has had far-reaching results. Blueprint has become a resource of note throughout the country and has won awards from several national professional associations.

Robert A. Gonzalez

Jury Comments

Donlyn Lyndon: Blueprint is an assessment of where people are, and a projection of what kind of things need to be done. It is an interesting example of combining the research and the participation process. A lot of things we received in this category have to do with public outreach. This submission doesn’t aim for public outreach with images of what you might have, which is what planning is often doing; instead, it presents an assessment of what is out there. It presents a projection of what kinds of things you ought to be paying attention to.

Claire Cooper Marcus: I think it’s a wonderful model for other cities and metropolitan areas, in terms of its method, its focus group, and input from the many areas and groups. It is a handsomely produced that is accessible by professionals and the general public.

Lyndon: Also, it is a very good example of taking in a lot of input, information and jurisdictions, and making
a way of thinking about how they can all operate to
change each other's benefit. It then puts that information into
a form that is very accessible for people to understand,
including what the key issues are and some of the
actions that might be taken.

Gary Hack: This reminds me of the first regional plan
for New York, which was also, in its time, a chance to
commission research and pull together materials. It
served as a great moment when ideas were synthesized
for New York City. In a way, blueprint could have the
same impact, which is to rally people around the
region, around a set of ideas, and get them accepted
and serve as a guide. In the American scene, where we
have no significant regional planning organization
that can manage to pull the power of ideas and logic
together, this is about the best we could hope for to
shape the sense of the region.

Sarina Qurashi: This is a very useful document for
community building, and for similar projects of that
craft. This is trying to unify or offer unifying princi-
ples to a very important, quite large, very diverse area.

Lawrence Halprin: This is a thing that has been
going on in the Bay Area for perhaps 40 years, where
the interior of the Bay was saved by the Bay Coastal
Development Commission from becoming a river.
Then beginning the ring of transit that is going all
around the BART. It's one of the great planning
adventures of anywhere, I think — this saving. Blu-
prints demonstrates what many of us have been
attempting to do on an on-going basis over time.

Marcos: The authors of this were not a large govern-
ment-funded organization, or even the Association
of Bay Area Governments. It's a small, watch-dog, largely
volunteer, group of people.

Hack: In that sense, it is similar to the Regional Plan
Association in New York. And there are other exam-
les around the country of organizations looking for
models like this.

Halprin: It should be said that this is driving most
directors crazy, and making for many people a claim
that the Bay Area is where development is extremely
nuance, very expensive, forcing development not
do all the things it wants to do. It is an important idea
for that very reason. It doesn't come cheap, is what
I'm saying.