

A SERIES OF TRAVESTIES MAKES A DANGEROUS TAPESTRY

**L.A.'S PLANNING CRISIS AND
WHAT COULD BE DONE IN
RESPONSE**

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DESCRIBING AND UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM



THE REAL LOS ANGELES PLANNING PROCESS

- ◆ The real Los Angeles planning process has at least 7 components:
 1. General Plan and Community Plans
 2. Public agency *sectoral* budgeting through CIP and external agencies.
 3. Implementation through zoning, while Plan policies are shelved unless they can justify greater density.

THE REAL PLANNING PROCESS IS FOUGHT LOT-BY-LOT THROUGH FOUR OTHER STEPS

1. **Communities push back through Specific Plans and related limited down zoning**
2. **Up-planning and up-zoning through discretionary actions**
3. **Appeals of discretionary actions**
4. **Bootlegged and illegal construction**

L.A.'S REAL PLANNING PROCESS IS GETTING WORSE

- ◆ **General Plan Framework's horizon year is 2010, and there is no update underway or planned.**
- ◆ **Policies and forecasts based on the boom years are being continued even though LA is a mature city with a sinking economy and static population.**



LOS ANGELES
CITYWIDE GENERAL
PLAN FRAMEWORK

A CITYWIDE LONG RANGE
COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH L.A.'s GENERAL PLAN

- ◆ **The Framework never updated two 1960's infrastructure elements.**
- ◆ **Infrastructure monitoring dropped 10 years ago from Framework program.**
- ◆ **No monitoring of Framework policies.**

CART BEFORE THE HORSE

- ◆ The land use component of the General Plan, the Community Plans, are being updated.
- ◆ But, how do we really know how the city will change over the next 25 years?
- ◆ If, in fact, LA's population will grow, where are the best places for new development based on infrastructure and real demand?



UNFOUNDED ASSUMPTIONS

- ◆ Like the Framework, the community plan updates make many unwarranted assumptions:
- ◆ Based on historic trends, the city's population will grow at a consistent rate.
- ◆ The City should up-zone and up-plan in response to this growth.
- ◆ Up-zoning and up-planning produce affordable housing and decent jobs.

Day-to-day consequences of bad planning are everywhere

- ◆ **Out-of-character, out-of-scale projects exceeding infrastructure capacity and municipal services.**
- ◆ **Worst traffic congestion, air, and streets in entire country.**
- ◆ **Visual pollution through bad projects, rampant billboards, bootlegged signs, and inadequate landscaping.**

FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF BAD PLANNING ARE REVEALED DURING CRISES

- ◆ **L.A.'s famous "four seasons" are made much worse by poor, negligent, and missing city planning:**
 - **Fires**
 - **Floods**
 - **Earthquakes**
 - **Civil disturbances**

**Areas prone to fires, such as hillsides,
were not intended for residential.**

**House
burning
in Los
Angeles
wild
fire.**



Flood plains should be a no-go for land use, while natural rivers are essential for the environment.

- ◆ **The Los Angeles river is the worst of both worlds.**



Geology should be closely considered in preparing plans, zoning, and building codes



- ◆ **Broken gas main spewing flames after Northridge earthquake.**

According to Newsweek, 1992's "riot" was really a revolt of the have-nots versus the haves.



- ◆ **Equity-based planning after 1965 could have produced a different Los Angeles.**

PLANNER'S TOOL BOX MISUSES

MANY GOOD TOOLS - CEQA

- ◆ **California Environmental Quality Act should not have developers prepare EIR's.**
- ◆ **Statements of Overriding Considerations (e.g., job creation), in which unmitigated adverse impacts are ignored. should be subject to proof.**

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES CAN BE USED TO SELL CONGESTION

- ◆ **Transportation Demand Management (TDM)**
 - Bus passes, carpools, vanpools
- ◆ **Transit adjacent to commercial projects**
- ◆ **Bike racks and bike lanes**



DESIGN REVIEW SHOULD BE PART OF GOOD PLANNING -- NOT IN LIEU OF IT.

- ◆ **Design review boards – established by ordinance or asserted through neighborhood councils.**
- ◆ **Specific Plan and Community Design Overlay Ordinances with design guidelines applied by staff.**
- ◆ **Off-site landscaping improvements through conditions.**

DESIGN REVIEW CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR QUALITY LAND USE PLANNING



**PRETTY BOWS CAN BE USED TO GIVE A
“MAKE OVER” TO BAD PROJECTS
REQUESTING DISCRETIONARY APPROVALS**



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION CAN CREATE AN ILLUSION OF POWER

- ◆ **Advisory committees**
- ◆ **Focus groups**
- ◆ **Workshops**
- ◆ **Public hearings and appeals**
- ◆ **They can become *empowerment* devices because they give the feeling of participation in decision making, but without sharing any actual power.**



**WHAT OUGHT TO
BE DONE TO
IMPROVE THE
PLANNING
PROCESS IN LOS
ANGELES**

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SOME OBVIOUS PLANNING FIXES

- ◆ **Thorough update of the Los Angeles General Plan.**
- ◆ **Base all ordinances on infrastructure capacity and environmental needs, not imagined populations growth.**
- ◆ **Pursue local plans after General Plan update.**
- ◆ **Eliminate most discretionary actions.**

PLAN FOR THE ENTIRE CITY

- ◆ **The General Plan addresses the entire land area of the city.**
- ◆ **This means that public investment through the Capital Improvement Program must be linked to the General Plan.**
- ◆ **Outside agency projects (LAUSD). must conform to the General Plan**

LET'S THINK OUT OF THE BOX

- ◆ **Encourage and support the preparation and adoption of local plans prepared by local communities.**
- ◆ **Give neighborhood councils control over discretionary actions considered in their boundaries.**

**WHAT LOCAL
COMMUNITIES CAN DO
TO SOFTEN THE BLOW
AND, HOPEFULLY,
REFERSE THE PROCESS
OF WORSENING
PLANNING.**

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PART OF THE “FIX” MUST TAKE PLACE AT THE MACRO LEVEL

- ◆ UCSD historian Prof. Chalmers Johnson has clearly described the history and dimensions of U.S. empire in terms of bases, war, and the domestic price of over-extension: eventual internal collapse.



US military bases world wide 2001-2003

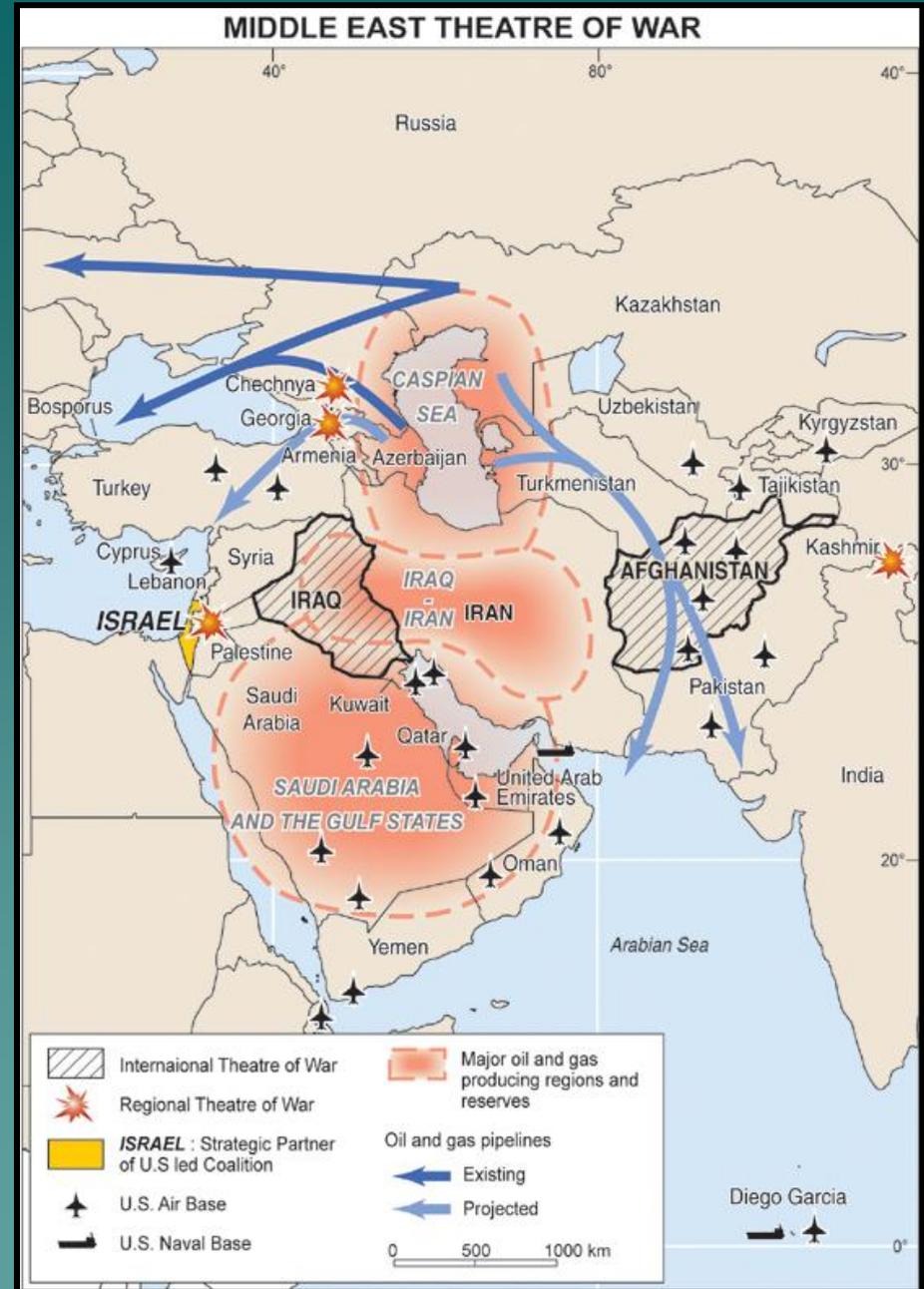
In this period the United States has over 730 military installations and bases in over 50 countries. It also has military personnel on active duty in dozens of other countries.



Behind a veil of secret agreements, the United States is creating a ring of new and expanded military bases these encircle Afghanistan and enhance the armed forces' ability to strike targets throughout much of the Muslim world

'Their function [recent US military bases] may be more political than military, said Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz .The new bases 'send an message to everybody...'

- ◆ The list of active U.S. wars is expanding from Iraq and Afghanistan to Pakistan, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and possibly Iran.
- ◆ The cost and attention of each hollows out local government.



TAKE HEED OF JOHNSON!

- ◆ He argues that the price of these escalating foreign wars and a vast network of foreign military bases will be domestic implosion by 2050.
- ◆ His 40 year time line seems wildly optimistic.
- ◆ Without taking on the warfare state, domestic reforms, such as good local planning and proper funding of services and infrastructure, are highly unlikely.

THE OTHER PART OF THE SOLUTION IS LOCAL

- ◆ Without decision making power, local communities must rely on their own expertise and alliances, large scale organizing, and the full spectrum of political tactics.
- ◆ Law suits are only part of this picture.



SOME WAYS TO PUSH BACK!

- ◆ **It is critical to reject and rebut the weak arguments offered by the pols and the media to justify cutbacks and then support of awful private projects.**
- ◆ **Sometimes the struggle is just to have the City follow its own laws and administrative procedures!**

“NO MONEY” REALLY MEANS LOW PRIORITIES

- ◆ **The “just no money” argument justifying reduced infrastructure investment and cutbacks in public services must be rejected and rebutted.**
- ◆ **How can there be enough money to construct a new Home Depot in Sunland-Tujunga, but not enough to hire building and sign inspectors on Foothill?**

THE BOGUS 'NO MONEY" CLAIM

- ◆ How can there be money for a 900,000 square foot regional center in the middle of Hollywood, but no money to develop local parks?
- ◆ How can there be money to 30,000 plus more troops to Afghanistan, but not enough for teachers and other civil servants?

THE 'BAILOUTS' SAY IT ALL

- ◆ **How can trillions be borrowed and printed to bailout banks and Wall Street, when “just no money” supposedly explains why the U.S. does not have high speed rail, free higher public education, and universal health care?**

“BEWARE OF GREEKS BEARING GIFTS”

- ◆ **The story of the Trojan Horse should also guide us in responding to local planning initiatives.**
- ◆ **For example, the update of the community plans, called the New Community plans, has the trappings of such a duplicitous gift.**

THE NEW COMMUNITY PLANS

- ◆ These plans are being prepared without a current general plan indicating how much Los Angeles will likely grow, and how and where that growth should be located.
- ◆ Nevertheless, it appears that the new community plans will have substantial up-planning and up-zoning folded into them.



A BOON TO DEVELOPERS

- ◆ **If/when the community plan update process succeeds in Hollywood, many communities are likely to quickly have substantial increases in their permitted density.**
- ◆ **With these gifts to developers, many new projects could then be built by-right and no longer need discretionary actions, such as zone changes.**

RESPONDING TO THE NEW COMMUNITY PLANS

- ◆ Demand that an updated general plan precede any local plans.
- ◆ Insist that the Community Plans follow the logic of Specific Plans.
- ◆ Zoning should be driven by environmental concerns and infrastructure capacity, not imagined population growth and imagined benefits of up-zoning.

A TEST FOR THE UPDATED PLANS

- ◆ **All up-zoning should be contingent on results.**
- ◆ **If the rationale that up-zoning produces transit ridership, affordable housing, and decent jobs does not pan out, the “gifts” should be reclaimed by the giver.**
- ◆ ***The entitlements and implementation ordinances should be revoked.***

SOME FAREWELL WORDS

- ◆ It is easy to be bamboozled by many planning initiatives, like citizen participation and design review, because they sound good and the presenters are well-meaning.
- ◆ **There are no silver bullets or knights in shining armor, especially when you observe so much pillage and plunder at City Hall.**

THERE IS PLENTY OF WORTHWHILE GRASSROOTS WORK

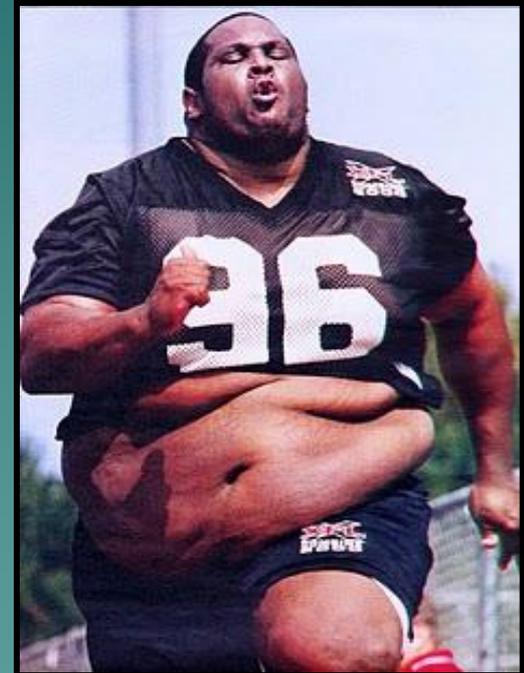
- ◆ **There is no substitute for careful analysis, consistent community organization, alliances, and a full court political press on decision makers at all levels of government.**

SOME HELP MAY BE ON THE WAY

- ◆ **Local communities are not alone in these efforts.**
- ◆ **A few professional city planners will work with community groups in lieu of helping developers get entitlements.**
- ◆ **Up to 30 L.A. city planners will soon retire, and some may go “rogue.”**
- ◆ **UCLA, USC, and several Cal States have planning programs which can be tapped for expertise.**

TIME TO GET THE LEAD OUT!

◆ **If they can do it, so can you!**



KEEP IN TOUCH

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