

Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Meeting Minutes



September 5, 2012 Meeting Minutes **DRAFT**

Council Members present: Chair Ken Alex, Director, OPR; Vice-Chair Bob Fisher, Public Member; Secretary John Laird, California Natural Resources Agency; Secretary Matt Rodriguez, California Environmental Protection Agency; Secretary Diana Dooley, California Health and Human Services Agency; Secretary Brian Kelly, California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

Call to Order - Chair Alex called the meeting to order.

Approve July 11, 2012 Minutes (Action Item)

Secretary Laird moved to approve the minutes; Secretary Dooley seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item: Executive Report

Executive Director (ED) Heather Fargo shared some thoughts and recommendations to the Council in light of her planned departure. These are documented in the September 2012 Executive Director's Report, which is posted on the September 5th Council Meeting page of the SGC website.

ED Fargo also provided an update on the work of the Health in All Policies (HiAP) Task Force. The Task Force hosted a state agency workshop on *Complete Streets*, which received broad attendance. UC Berkeley's Center for Cities and Schools is facilitating a series of cross-agency meetings in the fall to discuss sustainable communities and K-12 infrastructure planning. HiAP staff is looking for state agencies or departments to pilot a healthy, sustainable food procurement program.

Secretary Dooley stated that she is very proud of HiAP and its staff. She announced that the Task Force has created an interagency Farm to Fork office with support from the California Department of Education, Department of Public Health (CDPH), and Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). Secretary Dooley explained that in addition to the HiAP Task Force, HiAP is also a key function of the newly created Office of Health Equity in the Department of Public Health. HiAP is a broad process and way of doing business that is gaining traction with state and local agencies across California. Secretary Dooley recognized Dr. Connie Mitchell, Chief of the Policy Unit in the Office of Health Equity, for providing CDPH leadership on HiAP.

Agenda Item: Comments from the Chair and Council

Secretary Dooley explained that because of recent conversations in the California Legislature about CEQA, she had been thinking about what or who might be the best agent to examine CEQA reform. She asked the Council if the SGC might be an appropriate body to further study the issue. Chair Alex stated that OPR is spending a lot of time looking at CEQA, and that OPR is probably the best place for that work to happen.

Agenda Item: Strategic Plan Action 1 – Coordinate State Programs

ED Fargo reminded the Council that at the July meeting the Council had expressed interest in using High Speed Rail as a catalyst for coordinating the efforts of agricultural preservation and habitat mitigation. She stated that she and staff have had several meetings and conversations with interested parties, including the California High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA), Department of Conservation (DOC), CDFA, and the Regional Advanced Mitigation Planning (RAMP) work group. ED Fargo explained that the RAMP work group has identified some policy and administrative barriers to large-scale implementation, and she stated her belief that the SGC could help overcome some of these hurdles. She also expressed the value of using the SGC to facilitate state and local discussions regarding agricultural preservation in the context of High Speed Rail.

Chair Alex asked if the SGC is submitting a proposal to HSRA about the SGC's role. ED Fargo responded that a proposal is indeed one part of what staff is working on.

Jim Houston of CDFA expressed his support of SGC involvement in these issues. CDFA is closely watching both High Speed Rail and the Bay Delta Conservation Plan because these two enormous projects demonstrate a need for strategic planning. Reaching out to cities and counties and helping them plan for impending changes adds credibility to the process. Mr. Houston stated that High Speed Rail can be used as a model for future agricultural preservation efforts. Chair Alex stated that some see High Speed Rail as solely a threat to farmland, but that if done well it actually provides the state an opportunity to reinforce its commitment to farmland preservation. Chair Alex expressed his appreciation that Mr. Houston and CDFA recognize that potential.

Vice-Chair Fisher asked Chair Alex what he sees as the Council's practical involvement with this effort. Chair Alex stated that the SGC is in a good position to coordinate some of these state efforts and to conduct outreach to local governments, talking to locals about the planning necessary to make High Speed Rail a success for their community. Vice-Chair Fisher expressed concern that the Council's small staff might not have the capacity to play a major role in such a large effort. Chair Alex said that the Council would need to rely on other agencies, and that perhaps it could take the form of HSRA providing positions to SGC to work on these issues, and help from other agencies.

Mark Nechodom, Director of DOC, summarized some of the work accomplished by DOC relating to this effort. DOC has been in discussions with HSRA for 18 months regarding agricultural mitigation, and in October the two organizations will sign a Memorandum of Understanding stating that they will work cooperatively and share resources. Director Nechodom stated that this is the best time for the SGC to define its role and get involved. There is a need to balance local and state interests, and the SGC might be able to provide some of this big picture framing of the issue.

ED Fargo asked the Council if this effort is a priority. Chair Alex confirmed that it is a Council priority.

Liz O'Donoghue of The Nature Conservancy stated that the RAMP work group welcomes the SGC's involvement. However, she cautioned that because the RAMP work group is already resource-constrained, the effort to apply RAMP to High Speed Rail must be resource-neutral for the RAMP work group. The RAMP work group has already created a long "wish list," so the next step is determining which items are the most appropriate for the SGC to pursue.

Chair Alex asked if the Council could be provided with this list of barriers/problems identified by the RAMP work group, along with recommendations and a timeline. ED Fargo said that staff would provide this list to the Council in time for discussion or decision at the November Council meeting.

Agenda Item: Update on *Urban Footprint Modeling Tool*

Chair Alex explained that because *Urban Footprint* analyzes more than urban areas, it's more appropriate to call it something like *California Footprint*.

Vice-Chair Fisher stated that he had recently received a helpful briefing from staff regarding this tool, and he recommended that other Council Members consider doing the same.

Allison Joe, OPR, presented an update to the Council. When the Council awarded grants in 2009 to improve modeling capacity for the state and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), one of these awards was a \$1.5 million grant to HSRA. The delivered product, *Urban Footprint*, was developed by Calthorpe Associates and is an open source software tool that compares land use options for future growth. It estimates outcomes, including public health, transportation, water, building energy, fiscal/household spending, and land consumption. For example, it could be used by an MPO when developing a Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) or by a city when developing a General Plan. It performs very quick analysis and is accessed through a web browser, lending itself to public workshops and stakeholder planning sessions.

Scott Gregory, California Technology Agency (CTA), explained that CTA has conducted a technology review of *Urban Footprint*. It will be finalized soon. This review found that it is indeed built entirely on open source technologies, which has the benefits of user-adaptability and no licensing fees, but which requires that a robust governance structure exist for the model to be successful. This will require funding for maintenance and operations. Furthermore, the review found that the data outputs are compatible with state systems, and that *Urban Footprint* is capable of integrating with CTA's upcoming Geoportal.

Ms. Joe explained that OPR is going to facilitate an independent peer review panel of national experts to review and validate *Urban Footprint*. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) is simultaneously conducting a feasibility study with the intention of using *Urban Footprint* for the next iteration of their RTP/SCS. These reviews will inform options for who might host or maintain it, the tool's governance structure, and the state's potential role. Ms. Joe stated that these options and resulting recommendations will be presented to the Council for action in November.

Vice-Chair Fisher expressed interest in maximizing the value of the Council's investment and asked if the SGC can promote use of the tool by making its use a condition of future grant funding. Ms. Joe responded that staff would look into this option, but that *Urban Footprint* may not be ready in time for the next round of grants. Chair Alex noted that the tool's value grows with the user base, so adoption will likely grow and snowball on its own.

Secretary Kelly asked whether High Speed rail intends to use it. Ms. Joe explained that this is one of many tools in HSRA's toolbox. She stated that *Urban Footprint* might be used for station area planning.

Secretary Laird asked if *Urban Footprint* could, for example, measure and compare the expected water use from two hypothetical growth patterns: one with more sprawl and another more compact? Ms. Joe confirmed that it is capable of this type of analysis. Secretary Laird asked if local governments want to use such a tool. Ms. Joe replied that some do, and some do not; they can use it at their discretion.

Secretary Kelly asked whether the open source status reduces costs to local governments. Ms. Joe replied that it is possible, but we do not know, and this will be examined as part of the peer review process.

Vice-Chair Fisher expressed interest in seeing the tool widely used.

Chair Alex said that we need the results of the peer review, and we need to know the strengths and weaknesses of different models.

Gordon Garry of SACOG spoke to his organization's involvement with *Urban Footprint*. He explained that SACOG has been using a different web-based scenario planning tool for ten years, but that they are planning on investing in *Urban Footprint* for their future work because of its open source nature and its very robust data structure, and because of the potential for wider adoption. He stated that SACOG is investing in making some improvements to the current version of *Urban Footprint*, and that they believe these improvements will help all future users. To allow SACOG to use the model for their next RTP/SCS, they must be running the improved version of *Urban Footprint* by February 2013.

Huasha Liu, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), stated that her organization plans to use *Urban Footprint* for scenario planning. She explained that SCAG had a very positive experience working with *RapidFire*, a simpler spreadsheet model closely related to *Urban Footprint*. SCAG had selected it through a procurement process, and SCAG's Board was pleased with the results. Now SCAG is looking for a more refined scenario planning tool, and they believe *Urban Footprint* is a good next step in this process. It includes a public health component. SCAG wants to use it in their next RTP/SCS. She encouraged the Council to play a role in making *Urban Footprint* available to regions and locals.

Vice-Chair Fisher observed that while he's glad MPOs will be piloting the tool, he sees value in a city pilot as well. Ms. Joe agreed, and explained that staff has been looking at options for a city pilot.

Wendy Alfsen of California WALKS spoke in support of SGC's work with Urban Footprint and in support of strongly incentivizing the tool's use.

Liz O'Donoghue of The Nature Conservancy spoke on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council and The Nature Conservancy. She expressed support for the Council's work with *Urban Footprint* and encouraged close partnership with the MPOs in designing the governance structure. She suggested that the Council look at enhancing the tool's infill and conservation elements, including parcel-level analysis.

Agenda Item: Barriers to Sustainable Communities and Infill Development

Vice-Chair Fisher presented an update on the Council's work to identify and reduce barriers to infill development. He reported that since the July Council Meeting, he and staff have held several more meetings with builders and affordable housing representatives, resulting in some positive ideas about how the Council may be able to support regional agencies and local governments to make infill development easier.

Vice-Chair Fisher discussed the need for General Plans and zoning policy to be more compatible with infill development. However, this is made difficult by insufficient local funds to update plans and codes, limited local knowledge about what policies are needed, limited public understanding of infill development, and insufficient ability to quantify infill benefits.

Vice-Chair Fisher explained that these findings may be used in developing OPR's 2013 updated General Plan Guidelines. He said that recommendations regarding this update should be on the November Council agenda. Vice-Chair Fisher also expressed interest in using the SGC's next round of Planning Grants to help fund local governments that are trying to address these barriers, especially those policies that will have transferrable value to others.

Vice-Chair Fisher stated that staff is beginning an assessment of what role *Urban Footprint* can play in reducing barriers to infill development. It has the potential to measure the value of infill development, create a more fully-informed public process, and address specific infrastructure cost uncertainty issues.

Liz O'Donoghue spoke on behalf of Amanda Eaken of the Natural Resources Defense Council in support of a robust update to the General Plan Guidelines that is focused on infill development.

Bill Higgins, CALCOG, expressed the need for formal, structured communication between regions/locals and the SGC. For example, although the Council discusses and decides on many issues that very directly affect MPOs, there is no mechanism for structured dialogue between the SGC and MPOs. Mr. Higgins acknowledged that there is a fair amount of ad hoc communication, but formal communication plays an important role. Chair Alex asked what form this might take. Mr. Higgins said that one option is that OPR's Planning Advisory and Assistance Council be used in an advisory capacity to the SGC.

General Public Comment

Larry Greene, Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, stated that air quality management districts play an important role in implementing MPOs' plans, so air quality management districts should be included in any sort of communication mechanism as described by Mr. Higgins in his above comment.

Agenda Item: Meeting Adjourned - Chair Alex adjourned the meeting.

CLOSED SESSION – Action: Personnel