

The Great Communities Collaborative

The Bay Area expects a surge of 1.7 million new people over the next 25 years. Unless we change our current growth patterns, new development will continue to bulldoze our farmland and hillsides for luxury estates, big-box stores and strip malls. Low and middle income families will continue to be pushed out of existing communities in the Bay Area, and quality of life will plummet as congestion skyrockets and those who don't drive become increasingly isolated.

Yet there is an incredible opportunity to fundamentally shift the way we are growing. We can redirect growth away from natural areas and working farms, and instead reinvest in our existing communities, many of which have been ignored for too long. We can build homes that provide enough choices so that all residents, at every income level, can find great communities to live in: communities with access to good schools, parks, transportation, shopping and other necessities.

To have an impact that broadens access to opportunities for all families, protects the environment, and promotes active living and better health, we can't just build a few model communities. We need a regional approach. That is why the four leading Bay Area nonprofits that work on transportation, housing, social equity, and open space launched the Great Communities Collaborative. Teaming with these regional nonprofits

are Reconnecting America, a national nonprofit who advances transit-oriented development through research, market analysis and trainings; The San Francisco Foundation; the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the East Bay Community Foundation, providing added capacity and resources.

This unprecedented collaborative brings together the necessary technical expertise, organizing depth, and community contacts to ensure that communities have the tools to relieve the housing crisis, improve our neighborhoods, and create a Bay Area that is a model for other fast-growing regions.

Challenges to Great Communities

Unfortunately, the obstacles to creating great communities are significant. Outdated zoning codes prohibit traditional town centers with their mix of homes, shops, and businesses. State fiscal policies push cities to compete for sales tax revenues instead of providing homes. Too few cities ensure that new homes are available to people of all income levels or ensure that economic development benefits all members of the community.

Significantly, most decisions about where and how to grow do not involve community members in a meaningful way. Because so many proposals do not come out of a community-based plan there is little surprise that residents often oppose infill development; they see it as being imposed on them without adequate community benefits or involvement.

A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

Over the next several years the Bay Area will have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to stop poorly planned growth and reinvest in our existing communities. Since 2000, Bay Area voters have approved \$12 billion in new mass transit investments, and will add 100 new stations to the region's existing 305 rapid transit stations and transit corridors. Our regional transportation authority has awarded grants to dozens of cities to refocus development around new and existing public transit infrastructure. And now, with



Todos Santos Plaza is home to a weekly farmer's market, lined with mixed use buildings, and a short walk from the Concord BART Station.

the groundbreaking SB 375 law, regions throughout California will be expected to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by creating more walkable, transit-oriented communities.

Neighborhoods within a half-mile radius of transit stations, known as “station areas,” represent the Bay Area’s best hope to provide safe, affordable homes in walkable neighborhoods rich with services. Not only can these areas support a wide range of housing choices, they also provide well-documented transportation benefits. In fact, Fannie Mae allows families in these areas to qualify for larger mortgages. Their proximity to transit and services means they can invest in home equity, education, and other wealth-building activities, instead of spending money on two or more automobiles, which depreciate in value very quickly.

And there are other reasons to be optimistic. Changing demographics mean that by 2025 there will be consumer demand for an additional 550,000 homes near transit. Regional and state agencies are creating policies and funding to support new community planning processes.

The map on page 1-5 shows the Bay Area’s existing transit system and planned expansions. The blue dots show places where cities are - or will soon begin - developing new land use plans for these station areas.

Activating Communities

The Great Communities Collaborative’s primary goal is for all people in the Bay Area to live in complete communities, affordable across all incomes, with nearby access to quality transit by 2030. The members of the collaborative are committed to promoting this vision of sustainable and equitable development and to ensuring that residents are deeply engaged in planning for their neighborhoods.

Collaborative partners will work with community groups to ensure that plans preserve local assets and identify and fund needed services and amenities, such as parks, childcare centers and libraries. We will help local groups make sure that new growth does not displace residents and disrupt the local economy. And we will work with these groups over the long term to



Paseo Villas and Plaza in San Jose, CA is 314 unit mixed use building three blocks from four light rail stations.

make sure exemplary plans gain vocal and widespread support.

The Great Communities Collaborative is a unique cooperative relationship between four Bay Area nonprofit organizations – Greenbelt Alliance, the Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California, TransForm, and Urban Habitat – and the national nonprofit Reconnecting America. The East Bay Community Foundation, The San Francisco Foundation, and The Silicon Valley Community Foundation are also part of the Collaborative.

Collaborative members have close working relationships with a wide array of other stakeholders on TOD issues in the Bay Area. Among the partners that Collaborative members work with are regional agencies such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), local governments, community-based nonprofits, foundations, developers, planning experts, and the business community.

Together, we can do it.

Whether our passion is social equity, open space protection, affordable housing, or sustainable transportation, we must work together to ensure new development furthers all of these goals. Together, we can create great communities across the Bay Area.



To achieve these goals, we will engage in the following

Community Involvement

- Engage local groups to co-lead efforts and to build a list of supporters.
- Identify, recruit, and train local advocates.
- Create site-specific working groups to share information and coordinate activities of local and regional advocates.
- Support community involvement with Leadership Institutes on growth and development.

Education

- Distribute materials on best practices, such as fact sheets, toolkits, and sample presentations.
- Conduct walking tours of exemplary station areas.
- Organize public workshops and trainings on best practices in community design and equitable development.
- Coordinate presentations to city staff, commissions, and elected officials.

Analysis

- Provide analysis for community groups that compares proposed plans, zoning changes, and developments to best practices.
- Endorse plans that have exemplary programs to reduce driving and promote alternatives.
- Use trip generation models to show regional benefits of proposed developments.
- Prepare comments during environmental review.
- Coordinate with planning agencies to track the status of development activities near primary transit corridors.

Media

- Assist local advocates with media releases and strategic placement of letters to the editor and op-ed pieces.
- Provide media trainings on topics such as framing growth issues, becoming a resource for reporters, and generating positive coverage.