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## Building for optimization

By **TONY PAUKER AND MARY LYDON**

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As our region seeks the best solutions for managing growth in the coming decades, we could learn a great deal from a small Southern town about 2,100 miles to the east.

North Charleston, the third-largest city in South Carolina, set out six years ago to become the biggest urban redevelopment project in the nation, encompassing 3,000 acres of the historic city center and the old Charleston Naval Base, shuttered in 1996. But this was not just any redevelopment effort, but a sustainable one -- and one that the developer refers to as his most challenging to date:

"I view the community development business as the healing business. And true sustainability is about healing the social, economic, and environmental health of a region."

-- John Knott, *Urban Land Magazine*, June 2007.

What inspired John Knott and his company to take this challenge on? One word -- his vision of optimization.

Optimization is a new word that we would like to be added to the real estate lexicon. It describes a way of rethinking how to get the most out of our cities, our schools, our economy and our agriculture as we carve out a better future. We have passed the tipping point where issues of sustainability and green development have been woven into land use decisions.

It is time to follow the example of such unlikely bedfellows as mayors, rock stars, prime ministers and even Wal-Mart that are all taking leadership roles in the ongoing effort to go beyond sustainable development and make decisions that are not only good for the environment and the economy but that are also socially equitable -- otherwise know as the triple bottom line. This is change from the ground up which is organically how nature restores itself.

This new column will be exploring some early indicators of optimization in the San Diego region. It's a continuation of a *Daily Transcript* column "Building for Sustainability" begun in 2005 by Mary Lydon of the Urban Land Institute and NewSchool of Architecture and Design Professor Mike Stepner. They spent a year exploring people and places that were making a difference in bringing the movement of sustainability to the forefront in our region. Back then, they defined the word "sustain" as being "that which provides support or relief." The world in which we live in certainly needs support and relief and millions have heard the call and are implementing their visions driven by an impulse deep from within. So for the next few months, from the perspective of the built environment, we will present ideas, people, movements, and projects that are making contributions beyond the wave of sustainability toward optimization. This may range from the developer building a million square feet of office space to local farming and its impact on land, the environment and health.

Here are some early indicators of optimization efforts in San Urban Land Institute Smart Growth Awards -- This past June the San Diego/Tijuana District Council of ULI held its third annual Smart Growth Awards to honor projects that were successful examples of sustainability/optimization. These projects included adaptive reuse, a master-planned affordable solar-powered communities, LEED-certified high-rise office space, an affordable mixed-use project at a major transit stop, flex space on a challenging site, cultural preservation, progressive agricultural sustainability and corporate sponsored affordable housing.

General Plan Update -- The city of San Diego is now undertaking a much delayed overhaul of its General Plan to guide the city for future decades with a focus on preserving the quality of life in the region, while affording economic viability for land uses.

Del Sur -- The Del Sur master plan community in the northern part of San Diego is one of the first new residential developments in the nation to focus on green, sustainable, and LEED-certified planning and design strategies to accomplish a market-driven solution to meet housing demand.

Several prominent authors have cited a certain sense of urgency that is needed to positively transform our cities. And while we have seen many cities, including our own, make important strides to plan for the future, there is a rising need to address how all stakeholders can work together more effectively to achieve the very best plans for

managing future growth. We salute those who are innovating on their own here in San Diego, and we will continue to bring you innovative news from the "optimization" front over the course of the coming months. We also hope you will visit ULI San Diego/Tijuana at [sandiego.uli.org](http://sandiego.uli.org) to learn more about land use, sustainability and optimization.

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*Pauker, is chair and Lydon is executive director of ULI San Diego/Tijuana.*