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Planning for optimization requires an updated wardrobe

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Have you ever tried to squeeze into an outfit that you wore to your high school prom - you know the light blue tuxedo with the ruffles or that yellow taffeta gown? It didn't really fit.

As the years went by, you've become more sophisticated, and hopefully have better taste in clothing. Cities also grow and evolve. As the San Diego region has evolved over the past two decades, we have experienced a great diversification of our economy, extensive development and redevelopment across the county, the emergence of a world-class downtown and countless positive signs of change in our region.

With age comes wisdom, and now is the time to make some wise decisions to insure a healthy and prosperous future for generations to come as the San Diego region looks to the next 20 years, we must plan for an evolved urban environment by using vision, wisdom and innovation.

Despite all of the positive attributes of our region, let's realistically assess the challenges we face.

Despite our temperate climate, we live in a desert. Were it not for the Colorado River our lawns, golf courses and household taps would be bone dry.

In the late 1940s and 1950s GIs returning from the Second World War could purchase a single family home on a 5,000 square foot lot with one income. A veteran returning from Iraq or Afghanistan today will be hard pressed to buy a small condo on two incomes.

The growth accommodated by abundant freeways left the region without an alternate street grid network adding more stress for commuters.

Once known as a "Navy Town" with a manufacturing economy, San Diego has evolved into a region with increasing jobs in the lower-paying service sector working for the highly paid creative class. The middle class is shrinking.

UCSD and many of our public education institutions are world renown, but we have some of the lowest performing public schools in the state.

Our gas-guzzling cars and energy consuming lifestyles are contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and poor public health.

Even with a border fence around the county, we will add the better part of one million new residents over the next 20 years. Right now, there is no place to put them.

So is the glass half full or half empty? We would argue it is pretty close to full. With appropriate planning and leadership it can prosperously spill over. In January 2008, San Diego will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Nolan Plan.

John Nolan produced our region's first comprehensive urban planning document that addressed a rapidly expanding metropolis. Many of his sustainability themes are still relevant today. The balance of open space, urban living and work space, quality of life issues and the integration of a global economy requires looking forward in a way that challenges out-dated models for expansion while demanding creativity, discipline and collaboration like never before.

The City of San Diego's General Plan update, as well as SANDAG's regional planning tools will help to guide our future.

ULI San Diego/Tijuana has focused our programs on sustainability - what will help propel our region forward to embrace growth in a way that benefits residents and the economy.

Our Public Policy Committee will be working to develop a Sustainable San Diego 2030 Report that will identify and rate the top growth issues.

We challenge the real estate industry to begin to look at San Diego from a sustainability perspective and to join with us to help identify these top 10 growth issues. The blue ruffles and yellow taffeta were great way back when, but a new era warrants a new wardrobe.

Pauker, is chair and Lydon is executive director of Urban Land Institute of San Diego/Tijuana.