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## San Diego must grow up

By Mary M. McLellan, Michael Stepner

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*"Smart growth is a compact, efficient and environmentally sensitive pattern of development that provides people with additional travel, housing and employment choices by focusing future growth away from rural areas and closer to existing and planned job centers and public facilities."*

-- SANDAG

"Smart Growth" is just the latest planning buzzword for what used to be called growth management and, more recently, "New Urbanism," "Sustainable Design" or, in bygone days, just plain old city planning. But whatever it's called, the need to build community is, today, as important as ever. While we may differ on how to do what needs to be done, it is reassuring to note that, for the most part, we all agree on what it is that needs to be done.

Building a city is not unlike maintaining a personal relationship: both must be nurtured continuously by all the parties involved. The key is to have a framework that allows us to understand the relationships of all the issues so that we may respond accordingly.

So what are the issues we, as a community, need to address? To compile a list of the issues facing San Diego's future, we need to take a look at San Diego's past. Such an exercise reinforces the old adage that "planning is a continuous process." The process is not so much about completing a particular task that once and for all resolves the issues and solves the problem, but rather recognizing that we must work at these issues continuously.

Many organizations in San Diego, from small grassroots groups to internationally respected land use institutions, continue to conduct planning sessions, focus groups, design charters and strategic plans around all the planning issues that we have been grappling with for decades. But along the way, planning has changed. Major land use decisions can no longer be put off to the next funding cycle, the next political term or the next generation. We are beyond planning for the future because the future has caught up to us and we have jumped from planning for the future to being forced to implement thoughtful solutions now. If we relate the building of our city to a personal relationship, it is time to make a commitment, because the baby is ready to be born whether we're ready or not.

Periodically, the government, the media and the community compile lists of the important issues facing our region. If we look back to the days of John Nolen and the region's first plan in 1907, the lists have been remarkably similar to today: neighborhood improvement, housing, infrastructure and services, sewer and water, the natural environment and, of course, the airport.

In undertaking some research recently, we uncovered a 1957 New Year's edition of the *San Diego Union* in which the question was asked, "Can a city grow and stay beautiful?"

And, the *Union's* conclusion: The community must plan. "There must be plans to provide for efficient patterns of air, land and water transportation, for recreational facilities and for public service facilities, including water and sewage systems. Plans also must be laid to provide for public buildings, modern and efficient community design, renewal and redevelopment of some areas to eliminate substandard buildings and control blight." The *Union* commended the community for having approved \$56 million in bonds for public improvements.

The issues have not changed. The needs have not changed. What has changed is our willingness to pay for those things we, as a community, require to maintain our quality of life. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Taxes are the price of a civilized society."

There comes a time when we look at our lives, our relationships to each other and to life itself and we realize we are being called to grow up, to mature. This is the exact place where we find our city. It is time to grow up. We need to make commitments, keep them, pay for them, live within our means and plan to leave our city better than we found it.

As a community, San Diego is not short on vision. We know what needs to be done. We have prepared community plans that identify what needs to be done to accomplish our goals. The question is, do we have the commitment to follow through?

Commitment equates to trust, and commitment is usually built over time. It takes integrity and faith to nurture. But if self-serving interests get out of proportion, a quality relationship or a well-planned city cannot be cultivated, and the chasm of trust may appear to be too great to bridge. But we're out of time and space and all we're faced with is each other. It's time to put childishness aside and deal with the reality of the mess we have created and commit to one another to rebuild our community, our city, our relationship to one another on a foundation of integrity and trust.

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