

Creating new economic, political engines

By Mary Lydon
and Mike Stepner

Authors Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution and Jennifer Bradley of the Aspen Institute wrote the groundbreaking book, "Metropolitan Revolution." They write, "In the face of federal gridlock, economic stagnation and fiscal turmoil, power in the United States is shifting away from Washington and toward our major cities and metropolitan areas. Across the nation, these communities, and their resolutely pragmatic leaders, are taking on the big issues that Washington won't. They are reshaping our economy, and fixing our broken political system."

This vision is an empowered approach to creating 21st century metropolitan regions. No longer will metro areas rely on federal dollars to solve housing, environmental and infrastructure issues. With empowered confidence regions will step up and create their own goals that reflect their unique attributes and set the agenda for their economies. As this spreads across the country, metropolitan areas can use their collective economic power to shape markets, change business and philanthropy practices and catalyze new forms of innovative finance. As Katz and Bradley state "metro deals would proliferate throughout the country, substituting imaginative and productive solutions for legislative obstructionism and inaction."

We see early indications of a metropolitan revolution in our regional pragmatic leaders who are taking matters into their own hands and joining forces with a broad base of partners, likely and unlikely, to work on solving some of our greatest regional quality of life challenges.

Housing You Matters is a coalition comprised of leaders from Habitat for Humanities, Endangered Habitats League, San Diego Building Industry Association, San Diego Housing Federation, San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, a number of chambers of commerce, major employers and others. They are working to catalyze the building of housing that is more affordable to rent or own, especially for middle income households. They will do this by



New York Times

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conducting research and educating policy makers, development professionals and the community at large. They are working to implement policies that help streamline the development process and lower fees, reduce time and regulations — all of which can total up to 40 percent of building a new home

City of San Diego Climate Action Plan: The city of San Diego recently adopted one of the most far-reaching plans to address greenhouse gas emissions. As indicated in the Climate Action Plan transmittal letter by Mayor Kevin Faulconer, "This Climate Action Plan sets forth commonplace strategies to achieve attainable greenhouse gas reduction targets." He states in his transmittal letter that the plan does much more than the reduction of Green House Gas. "This includes cleaner air, the reduction on imported energy and water, support for active transportation, walking, biking and transit, the planting of trees, reduction of landfill waste and changes to our land use patterns to achieve this." The San Diego Climate Action Plan is a now national leader and has inspired other cities to follow suit.

City of San Diego Affordable Housing Density Bonus: A two-year effort by the San Diego Housing Federation, San Diego BIA, Circulate San Diego and the city of San Diego Community Planning Committee has resulted in San Diego having the most enhanced density bonus program in the state. In June 2016 a unanimous vote came after a host of housing and business groups spoke in support of the robust plan. The San Diego City Council voted to enhance its density bonus program to allow up to a 50 percent overall density increase for projects that include affordable housing.

The bonus exceeds the state density allowance by 15 percent and seeks to make projects more economically viable by increasing builder incentives and allowing builders to look off site to meet their affordable housing obligations under certain circumstances. The approval caps a two-year effort by the BIA and housing advocates to improve the program that had a history of limited use. San Diego is now home to the most enhanced density bonus program in the state.

Cali Baja Bi-National Mega-Region is an organization comprised of binational business leaders who have worked to provide our region with a unique economic global edge. For decades the San Diego region has been cultivating a binational innovation economy that is focused on research, education, high tech, green tech, bio tech and telecom. This economic development strategy is the future and will provide higher paying jobs for our regional workforce. Our unique binational region has all the characteristics necessary to become a world class center of integrated research and development, manufacturing and procurement.

Significant quality of life challenges like housing affordability, climate resiliency and connecting to the globe through our binational economy are but a few of the big issues that pragmatic and collaborative San Diego leaders are working on. We think this puts us clearly ahead of the curve in the new, emerging Metropolitan Revolution.

This inaugural column is the beginning of a monthly series where

we will write about the issues in our community and potential approaches for solutions. We look forward to hearing your thoughts about our ideas.

Mary Lydon of Lydon Associates is a strategic communications consulting firm specializing in land use.

Mike Stepner, FAICP, FAIA, is a professor at New School of Architects.



LYDON



STEPNER