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## COORDINATING GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT THROUGH CONSENSUS BUILDING

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine whether and how consensus building is useful for coordinating growth management. The study was devised to recommend to the California Legislature principles for designing a growth management program for the state. The findings outline the processes, the conditions, incentives and institutional settings in which consensus building appears to be most effective.

We recommend that the state establish a framework within which consensus building can and will be used as a primary method for developing policy on growth management. The task is to institutionalize the flexibility, adaptiveness, and self-management of consensus building, in order to create new norms of communication, interaction, and problem solving within a political and organizational framework that will encourage collaborative discussion and choice among the players in growth.

### **Defining the Problem and the Terms**

*Growth management* refers to activities at all levels of government to guide the location, density, timing, and character of growth. Its purposes include economic development, infrastructure planning, assuring the provision of facilities needed in a region, as well as protecting natural resources and open space. Growth management reflects a recognition that land use patterns are significant for a wide range of statewide policy objectives.

*Coordination* is a central task because growth is influenced by many agencies, levels of government, and private players. Power and responsibility for growth and the environment are fragmented — shared among players who have conflicting objectives. Many of them cannot succeed in meeting their own objectives without coordinating with others because their actions are mutually interdependent.

*Consensus building* refers to long-term, face-to-face group processes that incorporate key stakeholders, including representatives of public agencies, interest groups, and local governments, in a search for common ground. The methods of discussion build on mediation and negotiation techniques, but the consensus building we examined is broader and more anticipatory than ordinary conflict resolution. The groups were called together to prepare legislation, policies, plans, regulatory principles, and implementation strategies rather than simply to resolve conflicts.

### **The Cases**

We conducted 14 case studies of consensus-building efforts on growth management and related issues around the state, selecting cases according to four main criteria: (1) consensus building was central; (2) the problem or task cut across jurisdictional lines; (3) the duration of the process was sufficient to allow assessment; (4) the cases were geographically dispersed, north and south, urban and rural, and included the three largest metropolitan areas.

For each case we developed a common interview guide and interviewed 10 to 25 of the key participants, reviewed documents, and wrote an individual report (see Appendix). Study findings were developed from these individual case reports.

Cases studied were: the *Growth Management Consensus Project*, and its successor, the *Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition*, which brought together stakeholders representing the major statewide interests to develop consensus on growth management legislation; the *San Diego Regional Growth Management Strategy*, which involved all the cities and the county in that region; the *San Francisco Estuary Project* and *Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project*, both five-year processes that brought together a wide array of state and federal agencies, local governments, and private interests to develop a management plan for the estuary and bay; the group that put together the successful *Contra Costa County Measure C of 1988*, involving environmentalists, developers, and local government; the efforts to develop consensus on the large-scale development project in Los Angeles known as *Playa Vista*; *Natural Communities Conservation Planning* in southern California, which involved the state Resources Agency, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as environmentalists, agricultural interests, developers, and local government in an effort to prepare performance standards and guidelines to protect the coastal sage-scrub area; a similar effort in the *Coachella Valley*; *Bay Vision 2020*, the Bay Area's effort to build consensus on regional growth management legislation; and the *reuse planning process* for three military facilities, *Mather Air Force Base*, *George Air Force Base*, and *Fort Ord*. We also reviewed, briefly, regional efforts in Los Angeles concerning air quality, transportation, and growth management.

## FINDINGS

- Consensus building did not happen spontaneously. All the cases had either a legislative mandate or committed leadership to start them off, along with incentives for key players to seek agreement.
- Groups were self-organizing, whether the consensus process was mandated by law or was an ad hoc effort. The groups chose stakeholders; structured subcommittees; set ground rules; framed the problem; and decided on tasks, procedures, and products.
- Most groups tried to include all interested stakeholders to assure that the agreements could be implemented.
- Stakeholders came to the table and tried to reach agreement when the status quo had become unsatisfactory and they became convinced they could not accomplish their goals in other arenas, or when they became convinced they would have to participate to protect their interests.
- Participation and willingness to compromise were affected by members' perceptions of the likelihood that agreements would be implemented.
- When parallel arenas were available for resolving the issues, the potential for agreement was less.
- Staff played crucial roles in each case, facilitating and managing the whole process, and providing technical information.



- Consensus building takes substantial time — at least one year and as many as five in some of our cases to reach agreement on a complex plan.
- Consensus-building processes generally involved multiple committees, that formed and reformed in response to issues that emerged.
- Although the processes were highly conflictual at times, participants stayed involved, for the most part. They expressed support for the consensus approach to the issues and claimed to have learned a great deal.
- Local government representatives had a difficult time participating effectively, except where they were the principal players, as in San Diego. The reasons include limited staff capacity, the diversity of the local interests they represented, and the differences between elected officials and other players at the table.
- There are tremendous differences across the state's three largest metropolitan regions in attitudes toward regionalism and in the experience of agencies and jurisdictions in cooperating at the regional level.
- In almost every case, agreements were reached on legislation, plans, policies, performance and monitoring standards, or principles and guidelines for public agency action.
- It remains too early to judge the outcomes of the processes in terms of actions carried out as a direct result of formal agreements and plans, except in the Coachella Valley, where a number of actions have resulted.
- New consensus groups have been created in some cases to work out the implementation of plans. These continuing efforts are among the products of consensus building.

### **Social, Intellectual, and Political Capital**

Formally agreed-upon plans and policies were not the most important result of consensus building, nor its primary way of achieving coordination. Consensus building creates among the participants three types of shared capital — social, intellectual, and political — each of which plays a crucial part in coordination. Social capital, in the form of trust, norms of behavior, and networks of communication, creates the potential for serious discussion to take place among otherwise conflicting stakeholders. Intellectual capital, in the form of agreed upon facts, shared problem definitions, and mutual understandings, not only provides a common basis for discussion and moves the players toward agreement on policy issues, but allows them to use this shared information to coordinate many of their actions. Political capital, in the form of alliances and agreements on proposals that provide mutual gain, creates the possibility that proposals will be adopted and implemented. These can be thought of as capital because they represent value that grows as it is used. This capital lives on among participants even after the group disbands, and it helps to institutionalize coordinated action in the long run.

### **The Consequences of Consensus Building**

Consensus-building processes had the following results:

- Plans, strategies, legislative proposals, and ballot measures were produced that were supported by many, if not most, important stakeholders. Each of these in itself is a coordination tool.

- Consensus was reached on information describing the issues, on indicators for monitoring and assessment, or on scientific principles for environmental management. Stakeholders began to operate with the same information and criteria.
- Stakeholders formerly in conflict developed lines of communication and some degree of mutual understanding, trust, and capacity to work together constructively. They learned how their actions affected one another. They developed less stereotyped and less adversarial views of one another.
- New personal networks among stakeholders were created that assist their organizations to coordinate actions. These become flexible linkages across agencies, levels of government, and the private sector, which allow for rapid response to issues.
- Stakeholders affected by the issues, but not previously involved in public discussions, were brought into the processes and learned how proposals would affect them. Coordination was thus extended to more players, and actions were based on a broader set of perspectives.
- Stakeholders gained new and largely shared understandings of the problems and their causes and consequences.
- Stakeholder's organizations changed their actions, positions, and policies, moving closer to each other as a result of their representative's learning during consensus building.
- Some processes resulted in a shared understanding of how all members play a part in a common economic or ecological system.
- Participation has changed the practices of the members, many of whom have begun to use consensus building in their other work. The result is to reduce conflict and help to build a culture of collaboration among these agencies and interests.

These effects occurred in some, but not all, cases. Many conditions in the institutional context were important to the success of an effort, as was the design and management of the process itself.

### **Challenges and Next Steps: a Framework for Consensus Building in California**

Consensus building is a powerful tool for coordinating and reaching agreement in complex and controversial multi-issue, multiplayer growth management tasks. Collaboration, mutual learning, and problem solving through discourse permit the creation of formal and informal networks to shape policy in new ways. The most effective of consensus building processes institutionalize new modes of acting by creating social, intellectual, and political capital. Although consensus building is time consuming, it will save resources overall. The combined cost to public and private players of reaching agreements through consensus processes is likely to be less by an order of magnitude than the costs of litigation, delayed projects, and the cleanup of environments not protected. Consensus building encourages many types of coordination and mutual adjustment in the shared power context in which growth occurs.

We believe the State of California should give a central place in any growth management program to consensus building. To accomplish this the state will have to create a flexible framework and incentive structure within which consensus building can be done. These cases show that one of the principal challenges is to assure the willing and active engagement of

local governments in designing and implementing growth management. Their knowledge of how regulation and public investment play out on the ground, their control of land use, and their key role in implementing growth management make it essential that they come to the table and stay until agreements are reached. Yet, local governments were not major players in many of the cases we studied, so support and incentives for their participation will be needed.

The findings suggest a number of delicate balances that must be achieved to design a framework for consensus building:

- Participants in a consensus process need assurance that their labors will be taken seriously by decision makers, but the legislature or public agencies cannot commit themselves ahead of time to an idea or program they have not seen.
- Consensus building cannot work effectively if the issues are being fought out in multiple arenas simultaneously. Players need to believe the consensus process is the place where they must bring their concerns. On the other hand, the other institutions of government, the courts and the legislatures, are the locales for legitimate decision-making.
- Successful consensus building must be, to a great extent, self-organized and “owned” by the participants, but vast amounts of energy of leading citizens will be wasted if each group must learn from scratch the best ways to do things.
- Although self-organized processes across the state will be different in their structure, activities, and participants, there is a need to assure some consistency and fairness in the application of policy statewide.
- Consensus processes require time, and the amount will vary depending on the social, intellectual, and political capital the participants have already developed. But these processes also need closure and deadlines. The task will be to develop a framework that allows the right balance for each process within the deadline.
- Inclusion of all key stakeholders is important to assure that essential knowledge is included in the discussion, as well as to assure political support for proposals, but intransigent stakeholders can prevent agreement and drive away participants.
- Inclusiveness can lead to unwieldy, highly diverse groups in which deep discussion is difficult. Subgroups that are less diverse and smaller can discuss issues with greater depth and care. While such subgroups seem essential for the success of these processes, especially where they deal with highly technical or complex problems, there is no guarantee of support in the larger group for agreements reached in the small ones.
- Deep involvement by individual representatives is needed, but their level of understanding and commitment are often difficult to translate back to the stakeholder organization.
- Staff are necessary to consensus processes and they must be trusted equally by all participants, but the most cost-effective strategy has been to borrow staff from one or more of the participants. While fundraising can be done to pay for staff who are dedicated to the process, this is time consuming and not always feasible.
- Staff leadership and creative energy are essential to successful consensus building, but too much staff guidance can hinder the important sense of group “ownership” of the process.
- Formal sanctions and incentives to implement plans and policies are important to give them credibility, but might well be insufficient to assure implementation. Highly specific plans with strong sanctions imbedded in them are difficult to agree upon and may well

have undesirable unforeseen consequences. Thus, consensus building continues to have important functions throughout implementation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*State legislation should be designed to make consensus building an integral part of the development of growth management policies, plans, and implementation strategies.*

Consensus building plays an important role in coordinating growth management and potentially reduces costly conflicts. In so doing it permits the development and implementation of coherent policy in this complex arena.

*The state should establish and coordinate its own policies and programs related to growth and the environment.*

A principal obstacle to coordination at all levels is the conflicting messages and mandates that come from different state agencies. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that at least a few goals and broad principles at the state level are necessary to provide a framework for more specific plans by state agencies and regions and to establish criteria for resolving conflicts in agency missions.

*California should establish a state-level council, made up of agency directors, to set goals and priorities and coordinate state policies. This body should work with regional coordinating groups to develop consensually agreed-upon state strategy.*

This study shows that state agencies can achieve agreements among themselves and with other participants in consensus-building processes. In states where growth management programs have not included a responsible state council or commission, the legislature regularly has to prepare annual legislation to fill in gaps or correct initial programs, and regional players lack guidance. Such a council, along with regional goals, priorities, and policies, can provide the flexible and adaptive institutional framework that is needed to manage growth through consensus building. The social, intellectual, and political capital that are essential for institutionalizing long-term collaborative relationships depend on a consistent framework of expectations and processes that can be provided by a state council.

*Regional coordination and planning must be central to any growth management program.*

Growth management must have a regional focus. It is at the regional level where growth-related activities exert their effects. Metropolitan economies are regional in character, as are the activities of residents. Within regions are players with both the knowledge and the motivation to plan and implement growth management in consensually agreed-upon ways.

*The state should create strong incentives for regions to organize and for localities to join regional coordinating bodies and reach agreements. A primary incentive would be the requirement that state agencies follow regionally developed strategies that are consistent with state goals, priorities, and performance standards.*

Local governments should be offered at least two powerful incentives to cooperate with each other in the region. The state should make infrastructure funding contingent upon cooperation. It should also offer regions where there is cooperation the chance to influence state investment and regulatory decisions. Changes are also needed, however, in the fiscal

incentives and revenue-raising opportunities of local governments, which now discourage intergovernmental cooperation and encourage these governments to permit environmentally damaging forms of development. Incentives are likely to be more acceptable politically than sanctions for failures to cooperate. A regional strategy should be adopted consensually, with agreement of most jurisdictions within the region. Since the strategy will cover many issues and involve the distribution of both benefits and costs among localities, reaching agreement is feasible because many tradeoffs can be made. A region that does not adopt a growth management strategy of its own after two to five years could be subject to the state council's preparation of a strategy for the region.

*Regions should organize themselves, and establish consensually their own boundaries, institutional and interagency relationships, and committee structures and powers.*

As each region has a unique history and experience, and a unique distribution of responsibilities among its public agencies, participants must “own” their processes and design them to suit their own conditions and problems. Some regions already have the basis for cooperation in place. Some can involve a single county or COG. Others may require a system of subregions. No one-size-fits-all regional structure is appropriate for all regions in the state. Moreover, the structure of the regional coordinating group and its subgroups probably should evolve over time to adapt to emerging issues and problems.

*The state council should negotiate with each region to establish tasks and timelines, so that the differences among regions, the magnitude of their tasks, and the work they have already done can be taken into account.*

These tasks should be simply defined, leaving the details to be worked out at the regional level. Deadlines should depend on the scale and controversy of the tasks. It may be appropriate to establish statewide performance standards with interim targets suitable to different regions.

*The state council should negotiate performance standards, guidelines, or implementation strategies in a consensus-building way with regional bodies that have adopted regional coordination strategies and plans.*

These specifics of implementation may be more contentious than the setting of broad policy. Negotiation and consensus building in establishing standards and guidelines will anticipate or avoid many conflicts and assure that they take into account the diversity and unique characteristics of the different parts of this vast state. This negotiation will help assure support and implementation of state policy and objectives. The right to sit at the table with state agency heads can become a substantial incentive for the regions to organize themselves and for localities to cooperate in a regional context.

*The state council and regional coordinating body should be designated as the primary arenas for discussion. Where differences cannot be resolved within the region, mediation and conflict resolution services should be made available. Procedures should be established for appealing decisions of the regional consensus group at the state level, possibly to the state council or a designated hearing board.*

Our cases show that where there are multiple arenas for decision-making or substantial ambiguity about how and where decisions will be made, consensus building is undermined. Stakeholders leave the table or have little incentive to make difficult choices. Insofar as is legally possible, state agencies should refrain from making decisions on issues while they are under consideration in regional arenas and should indicate to participants that their decisions

will be respected if they are congruent with agencies' missions. In some cases the missions of state agencies may need to be changed to require them to consider growth management concerns in their decision-making. Mediation services, offered either through the state or drawing on the growing body of mediation professionals in the private and nonprofit sectors, can reduce the need for expensive and formal legal proceedings and appeals.

*The state should provide funding to staff the regional consensus-building efforts.*

Consensus-building processes will require technical, clerical, and administrative support, as well as support for professional facilitators to assist with particularly difficult tasks. The cost of staffing these processes is minor compared to the costs of conflict and failures to coordinate, which the state currently confronts. As these staff must be regarded as unbiased, the funding should not be controlled by an agency with growth management interests or one that is viewed as politically partisan.<sup>1</sup>

*The state should cooperate with regions in building a shared information base to support consensus building.*

Consensually agreed-upon technical information can play a significant role in coordination and can become shared intellectual capital for all participants. This can occur not only within regional consensus processes, but also between regions and the state.

*The state should provide financial support to local governments so they can take leadership roles in the regional consensus processes.*

The willing and effective involvement of local governments in regional consensus building is crucial to the success of growth management, but the costs of participation are now high for them and the benefits uncertain. To participate at all, much less to take leadership roles, local governments need to believe they can adequately represent their interests, and therefore need to dedicate staff time to participation, as well as preparing technical analyses and proposals. Because of the budget crisis and their need to deal with such fundamental issues as public safety, local governments have little staff to devote to such activities.

*The state should provide training and other forms of direct technical assistance to those involved in consensus building.*

Meetings of public bodies, city councils, and commissions have followed formalized procedures that regulate debate over differences. Consensus building, in contrast, requires listening, cooperating with opponents, and looking for common ground. These methods can be taught through workshops to group leaders, who in turn teach their colleagues. The state could designate the task to university mediation groups, professional mediators in the private sector, or a state office. This is a low-cost activity that promises substantial benefits over time.

Once regional strategies are developed, localities can make necessary changes in their plans to make them consistent with regional strategies. A properly designed incentive structure can assure that localities have an interest in preparing plans that are consistent with regional strategies and state policies — and may be the most effective way of assuring local cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> In New Jersey, an impact assessment of the consensually adopted state plan found that \$400 million would be saved annually by municipalities and school districts alone, \$65 million per year would be saved in capital infrastructure costs statewide, and air and water pollution would be significantly lower than without the plan. (New Jersey Office of State Planning, and Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research, *Impact Assessment of the New Jersey Interim State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, February 1992.)

To require local plans to be consistent with state or regional plans, and detailed, centralized review of these plans, is both inefficient and politically unpopular. From experience in other states, such as Florida or Maine, it is not even clear that such requirements provide an effective way to coordinate local and regional actions, nor that plan consistency can be unambiguously determined. The regional consensus group should identify its own enforcement and compliance mechanisms for members. This type of self-policing is most likely to be effective. In any case, a locality or region would not receive state funding for transportation, infrastructure, schools, or other activities if they were inconsistent with state goals, priorities, and standards, and with the regional strategy. This in itself is likely to give localities the incentive to make plans congruent with regional strategy. The state should explore various strategies for assuring consistency of local plans and proposals with state and regional policy, including providing standing to certain interests and agencies to challenge the plans and proposals, as well as using a voluntary certification process whereby a “certified” plan would not be subject to such challenge. This is a complex matter which we believe should be worked out over time in the process of implementing growth management.





## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to discover whether consensus building can be an effective method for achieving the coordination needed for managing growth in California. If so, we sought to learn how consensus building accomplishes this task, and what are the conditions for it to be effective. Our objective was to make recommendations to the legislature on the design of state growth management policies, processes, and organizational structures.

To answer these questions we evaluated 14 cases of major consensus-building efforts for growth management and related purposes in California. We found strong evidence that consensus building is a significant and useful tool for coordination, not only because it helps key participants in the growth process reach agreements on action but, even more importantly, because it helps them to build shared social, intellectual, and political capital. This set of social relationships and trust, agreed-upon data and understandings of the issues, and political alliances is the basis for long-term coordination. A comparison of the cases, along with a review of the literature on consensus building and dispute resolution, shows that consensus-building processes must be self-organized by participants, to some degree, but they also depend on support from the institutions of government. Groups need time, staffing, incentives for participation, and confidence that their efforts will have some results.

### Defining the Problem

*Growth management* refers to a broad range of governmental efforts to influence the locational patterns, density, timing and type of growth and development in an area, not simply to efforts to stop or slow growth. Its purposes are many, including encouraging economic development, maximizing the value of infrastructure investments, providing certainty for the private sector to do business, assuring the provision of such regionally needed facilities as public transit or waste treatment, avoiding wasteful competition among communities for infrastructure funding or development opportunities, and providing affordable housing as well as protecting natural resources, open space, and valuable environments and ecosystems. Growth management, in great part, is concerned with efficient use of public resources. It reflects the recognition that some patterns of growth are wasteful, and that land use patterns are significant for a wide range of statewide policy objectives. These patterns need explicit attention if the state is to implement its broad policy agenda.

The task of growth management is largely one of *coordination*.<sup>2</sup> That is, a principal goal is to bring the actions of many players into some common order and to make these actions

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<sup>2</sup> See Innes, 1992b.

work effectively as a system. A study of recent statewide growth management legislation<sup>3</sup> shows that most of the statutes make coordination a central objective. Public officials and the populace increasingly recognize that sprawling and inefficient patterns of growth are due to fragmentation of responsibility among public agencies, which makes it difficult to manage resources, protect quality of life, and provide for social equity or balance among environmental and economic objectives. Uncoordinated action amounts to no policy, at best, and to expensive and even paralyzing conflicts, at worst. Coordination is a prerequisite to an effective policy for growth because the actions of various agencies and private players are so interdependent.

The growth process entails many interdependencies. The top-down pursuit of narrow missions of public agencies to protect air quality or build highways comes into conflict with the reality that economic development and resource protection depend on many factors working together in a region. State and federal agencies both influence and respond to the patterns and timing of development by providing infrastructure and other growth-inducing investment, and establishing regulations to protect specific resources such as air or water. Local governments control land use, but, in doing so, react to the demands and constraints created by these investment decisions. Local land use plans in turn may increase the development pressure to which state and federal agencies respond. A local government's fiscal condition is in part contingent on its neighbor's land use decisions, because these can preempt its own ability to attract revenue-generating uses. Many private and public interest groups also influence local, state, and federal decisions, either through elected bodies or by challenging decisions in the courts. Any effort to manage growth or establish implementable policy requires the knowledge and, ultimately, the assent (or coercion) of many, if not all, of these players.

Many strategies for coordination exist for such multiagency, multijurisdictional tasks, and each has its own strengths and limitations. These range from centralized administrative strategies like consolidating agencies or making strict rules and implementing them through bureaucratic controls, to employing flexible linkage techniques such as sharing information across agencies, using informal networks among players, or to self-enforcing methods such as giving interested parties the right to sue to enforce adherence to common policies. An inventory of administrative strategies that have been used to coordinate growth management is given in Figure 1. Figure 2 details a number of more specific tools, such as requiring players to adhere to common goals or to create plans that are consistent with one another.

The term *consensus building* refers to group processes that typically incorporate many stakeholders<sup>4</sup> and involve a search for common ground and broad agreement (but not necessarily unanimity) through long-term, intensive discussions. The methods of communication often build on mediation and negotiation techniques, and on experience in disputes over

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<sup>3</sup> Innes, 1992a.

<sup>4</sup> We use this term to mean anyone with a stake in the outcomes, from those who stand to gain or lose directly, to public participants whose values are affected by a project. For the purposes of these processes, stakeholders represent organized interests, groups, agencies, or other organizations, rather than individuals representing themselves.

**Figure 1**

**ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES FOR INTERAGENCY  
COORDINATION IN GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

<b><i>Consolidation</i></b>	Combining of agencies with growth-related responsibilities into a superagency. Coordination occurs because the superagency has authority over the others, a mission which supersedes those of the separate agencies, and responsibility to assure actions are coordinated. <i>Example:</i> Legislation proposed by Bay Vision 2020 to consolidate ABAG, MTC and BAAQMD in the Bay Area.
<b><i>Top Down</i></b>	Command and control by a central agency which has goals, policies or plans. Coordination occurs by bureaucrats making implementing rules and judging the consistency of plans, policies or actions of other agencies or local governments with state policy. <i>Example:</i> Florida state growth management program.
<b><i>Quasi-judicial</i></b>	Players are permitted to challenge plans or policies as inconsistent with goals or policies of the state or region in quasi-judicial proceedings. Coordination occurs as players voluntarily develop consistent plans and policies or after legal challenges and court decisions that inconsistent plans must be altered. Some coordination may occur through “voluntary” or mediated settlements, bypassing the litigation. <i>Example:</i> Vermont state growth management.
<b><i>Back and Forth</i></b>	Horizontal, collaborative interactions among all players. “Cross Acceptance.” Coordination occurs during the process of designing and agreeing on plans, policies or standards through consensus-building group process. <i>Example:</i> New Jersey state planning program, interagency working groups.
<b><i>Bottom Up</i></b>	Mutual adjustment process starting with smallest units of government. Coordination occurs by getting localities and other agencies to make plans and identify and mediate conflicts among themselves. Aggregation of these plans becomes the basis for plans and policies of region or state. <i>Example:</i> Georgia state growth management program.
<b><i>Information Only</i></b>	Formal linkages across agencies requiring information exchange, consultation, and review of plans, policies and actions. Coordination occurs because players have the necessary knowledge of others’ actions to try stop them, alter them, or adjust their own. <i>Examples:</i> environmental impact assessment, federal A-95 review.
<b><i>Informal Networks</i></b>	Personal contacts and regular communication among individuals in different agencies and governments. Coordination occurs by incremental mutual adjustment as these individuals influence the policies and actions of their agencies, usually during the deliberation processes. Linkage may be horizontal across agency staff or provided by citizen watchdog or interest groups. <i>Examples:</i> Everywhere.

**Figure 2**

**TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION  
IN GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

<b><i>Common Goals</i></b>	These may be mandated centrally by the state or region, or jointly agreed. They may be broad or specific. They must be followed by all players. <i>Example:</i> All state growth management programs.
<b><i>Common Policies and Standards</i></b>	These include policy principles such as encouraging mixed use development, or preserving high quality agricultural land, or assuring development does not exceed infrastructure capacity, (concurrency) and standards like level of service for measuring that capacity. <i>Examples:</i> Several state growth management programs.
<b><i>Common Procedures and Criteria</i></b>	Standardized procedures, review criteria, regulatory practices. <i>Example:</i> Streamlined permit processing.
<b><i>Principles of Desired Urban Form</i></b>	Patterns of growth players agree to or are required to promote in their plans, policies and actions, such as containment of development, cluster patterns or growth along corridors as opposed to sprawling patterns. <i>Examples:</i> The New Jersey “centers” policy, urban limit lines in Oregon.
<b><i>Common Information Bases</i></b>	Includes geographic information systems, population or economic projections, traffic projections and models, environmental studies and analyses which all players use in decisions and debates. <i>Examples:</i> Everywhere.
<b><i>Regulatory Maps</i></b>	Maps used by all players, designating areas and defining or limiting actions that may be taken within them. <i>Examples:</i> zoning, plan maps.
<b><i>Plan-making Requirements</i></b>	All players are required to make formal, explicit plans, often following standardized formats, covering specified issues. Often combined with consistency requirements with other plans and other policies, standards etc. <i>Example:</i> Florida state growth management.
<b><i>Capital Budgeting Linked to Land Use Plans</i></b>	Linking of capital budget planning at all levels to growth management through comprehensive plans, infrastructure needs assessments, use of common level of service standards etc. <i>Examples:</i> New Jersey state planning, Orlando and the Florida Keys.

facility siting, environmental regulation, and community conflict.<sup>5</sup> In mediation and negotiation the objective is to resolve a specific problem that has turned into a conflict. We are interested here, however, in consensus building for broader and more anticipatory tasks. While the experience of consensus building in focused disputes is helpful (these disputes typically raise broad issues linking the solution to a variety of policies and actions), consensus building in the present study involves the framing of public issues, developing agreement on facts, and then setting desired policy directions, developing plans, regulatory principles, and even implementation strategies.

The idea of consensus building as a coordination strategy has been little recognized in the legislation or the literature to this point. Our previous research, however, shows that these group processes have been used in practice because the other tools are insufficient.<sup>6</sup> The “Back and Forth” model in Figure 1 represents the consensus building approach on which we have focused. Consensus building groups have been invented in other states to supplement growth management programs designed basically to be top-down bureaucratic approaches or laissez-faire or bottom-up models. Some states, like New Jersey, have relied fundamentally on consensus processes as their central tool. These group processes — task forces, working groups, commissions, and so on — did a variety of tasks that had often proved otherwise intractable, from setting policy to designing plans to problem solving, fact finding, or designing procedures or performance standards.

There are theoretical reasons to predict that face-to-face consensus-building processes will be important coordination tools in tasks like growth management. Thompson (1967) distinguishes among three different kinds of tasks that each require a different strategy for achieving coordination. Where tasks are well understood and repetitive, coordination can be done through standardization of practice (regulation). Where the outputs of one part of a system are inputs to another, an effective method of coordination is requiring that plans be consistent with one another. Where outputs of one part of a system are inputs to another *and* vice versa, then mutual adjustment is needed among players. Growth management clearly falls into this last category, and consensus building involving face-to-face meetings among the many players is a way of achieving the needed mutual adjustment.

Dryzek (1987) has argued that standard administrative practices have not successfully managed the complexity and the uncertainty involved in environmental management. He shows how and why market systems, administered systems, polyarchy, and other systems for social choice have failed to protect ecological systems. Group processes involving the knowledgeable actors, he argues (1990), have more potential for addressing a wider range of concerns and complex interactions than standard, top-down bureaucratic approaches, as well as a greater capacity to develop solutions tailored to the uncertain and unique contexts of particular regions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Key references include Fisher and Ury (1981), Carpenter and Kennedy (1988), Susskind and Cruikshank (1987), Sullivan (1984), and Moore (1986).

<sup>6</sup> Innes (1992a and b), and Neuman (1993).

<sup>7</sup> Dryzek’s book *Discursive Democracy*, 1990, elaborates this notion contending that a group process he calls

## **Incentives, Sanctions, and Institutional Framework**

Consensus building among players with strong interests and much at stake does not occur unless the conditions are right. Incentives and sanctions bring players to the table and keep them there. We have identified a range of sanctions and incentives that have been used in other states to encourage coordination in growth management, and some of these provide incentives for consensus building (see Figure 3).

The existence of alternative opportunities for action can undermine consensus building, as players will engage in it seriously only if they perceive that reaching agreement is preferable to working independently for their goals. They must believe that their participation in the process will be worthwhile and that what is concluded may actually be implemented. Thus, the institutional setting and the legislative framework can encourage or discourage consensus building. The linkage of these processes to the duly constituted public decision making bodies is also important because it determines whether the results will be significant. The purpose of this study is to help identify institutional frameworks that enable and support successful consensus building, rather than hinder it, as has been the norm.

## **Methodology**

The complexity of consensus building and of the conditions that affect its success or failure demanded a qualitative, holistic approach to the research. We have examined significant and visible cases in California where some form of consensus building has been attempted in growth management or related issues, including environmental management and military base reuse planning. Thus we believe that our findings will have value not only to growth management legislation, but also to a variety of other state initiatives requiring coordination of complex multi-issue, multijurisdictional tasks.

We had four criteria for case selection: (1) consensus building was central to the effort to coordinate; (2) the problem or task cut across jurisdictional boundaries and involved multiple issues and multiple players; (3) the effort had been going on long enough so that we could assess, to some degree, its consequences;<sup>8</sup> (4) cases from the three largest metropolitan regions of the state and from central California were included.<sup>9</sup>

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communicative action, which is much like the model of consensus building we describe here, is a more effective and democratic strategy for environmental management.

<sup>8</sup> We found only one major consensus building project that had been going on long enough to be in the implementation stage, so we did not have the option of evaluating consensus building by the actions it produced.

<sup>9</sup> We were fortunate in being able to conduct several case studies under the auspices of the project, with partial support from other sources, and with research associates' time contributed as they completed theses and coursework. These included the Santa Monica study, the Natural Communities and Coachella Valley cases, and the military base cases. This allowed us to complete far more research than the project funding allowed. All but the base closure cases were conducted according to our own standard methodology described below. The base closure cases were completed before our study, and independently of it. They involved a less systematic inquiry, less focused on consensus building. However, they offered sufficient overlap with our study that one of the authors (Kirschenbaum) has rewritten them for this project. The more complete version of that study appears in *War Games: Evaluating the California Military Base Conversion Process*, by Joshua Kirschenbaum and Dwayne

Figure 3

INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS FOR COORDINATING  
GROWTH MANAGEMENT

SANCTIONS	
<b><i>Preemptive Planning</i></b>	If plans of an agency or government are not coordinated with goals or plans of state, region or local government, a plan is prepared for that agency by another body. <i>Example:</i> Rhode Island state planning.
<b><i>Withholding of Funds</i></b>	State grants and other general funds may be withheld from a government or agency until it has demonstrated it is in compliance with coordination policies. <i>Example:</i> Florida state growth management.
<b><i>Funding for Projects</i></b>	Release of funds for projects may be contingent on showing they are coordinated or consistent with plans or policies. <i>Example:</i> Vermont housing and environment fund.
<b><i>Control of Permitting</i></b>	Permits for projects may be denied by regulatory agencies unless projects are in compliance with coordination policies. <i>Example:</i> Vermont environmental boards.
<b><i>Public Opinion</i></b>	Political pressure and public opinion created through citizen watchdog groups and the media can make it poor politics not to cooperate with policies for coordination. <i>Example:</i> 1000 Friends of Oregon.
INCENTIVES	
<b><i>Funding for Coordination Activity</i></b>	Central agency may provide funding specifically for coordination effort. <i>Example:</i> State of Georgia, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act.
<b><i>Incentive Funding for Coordinated Projects</i></b>	Additional funding for projects offered to clusters of agencies or localities which coordinate their requests among selves and/or with higher level agency. <i>Example:</i> Congestion Management in California.
<b><i>A Place at the Table</i></b>	Players are brought together to negotiate real decisions and have the potential to influence each others actions and final policies and plans. <i>Example:</i> New Jersey state planning.
<b><i>Tax-base Sharing</i></b>	Localities share the tax benefits of land uses, or the costs.
<b><i>Privileges to Those Who Coordinate</i></b>	Agencies and governments which have demonstrated compliance with coordination policies get special privileges, such as standing to challenge others' plans, or access to state funds for legal defense of plans. <i>Examples:</i> Vermont state growth management, Maine state growth management.
<b><i>Potential of Better Outcome</i></b>	Players can see that collaboration will produce a more desirable outcome for all, as a group, as well as individually. <i>Example:</i> San Diego Regional Growth Management Strategy.
<b><i>Peer Pressure in Groups</i></b>	Participation over time in a group may create an incentive to cooperate with other members and to produce a group product. <i>Examples:</i> San Francisco Estuary Project, San Diego Regional Growth Management Strategy.

For each of our cases, we interviewed staff and participants who had been deeply involved, reviewed memoranda, meeting minutes, analyses, and plans and policy documents, and attended meetings as timing permitted. We interviewed between 10 and 25 people for each case, trying to get as broad a range of perspectives as possible and to account for the complexity of the case. We always interviewed key staff and most of the players identified by staff or others as important participants, representing major diverging perspectives. Due to limits of time and funding we could not interview as many players as we would have liked, so we inevitably missed nuances and some perspectives. Moreover, we were seldom able to follow up on participants who had left the processes, so our understanding of dissatisfactions with the processes is, to some degree, limited.

We focused on getting an accurate history of events, disputes and agreements, and a clear understanding of processes used for discussion and reaching consensus. We identified the legislative and regulatory framework along with the decision making bodies and agencies with responsibility for addressing the problems. We sought to find out why players came to the table and stayed there (or in some cases left). We wanted to know what changes, if any, occurred in players' understandings, positions, and activities or those of the groups they represented, during the course of the process. We inquired how they reached agreement on any policies, information, or other outcomes.

We used a common interview guide developed collaboratively by Gruber, Innes, Neuman, and Thompson. The group also collectively reviewed preliminary findings from each case, identified questions for further exploration, and compared the cases. Thus, both the design of the inquiry and the interpretation of findings were done collectively. In some cases interviews were done by two group members, and in other cases by just one of the team. The case studies were drafted by individuals noted as authors for each, and reviewed by the rest of the group. Each case was also sent out for review and comment by several key players and staff to check on the accuracy of facts and to correct misinterpretations. Comments were used to revise the cases. Every effort has been made to present facts accurately. We have noted where there were differences among the stories and perceptions of respondents. Ultimately, we have offered our own ways of making sense of differing views.

The team did cross-case comparisons and prepared findings and recommendations qualitatively, on the basis of the preponderance of evidence. The diversity of the cases provides a broad base for comparison, but the numbers are not sufficient to offer meaningful statistics or quantitative conclusions. The report itself was outlined by the team and written by Innes and Gruber, with review and editing by Neuman and Thompson.

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S. Marsh (Working Paper 603, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California at Berkeley, December 1993).



## THE CASES

The full case studies are included in the Appendix. A brief synopsis of each is provided here. As the planning process in some of these communities extended beyond the period covered by our research, developments that have occurred since mid-1993 may not be reflected in the text.

The *Growth Management Consensus Project* was a statewide effort to bring together governments and interest group stakeholders to develop agreement on statewide legislation for growth management. Its successor, the *Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition*, continued the work and focused on drafting actual legislation in a smaller and less contentious group. Although no legislation has passed, agreement has been reached on significant components among players who were formerly in substantial conflict. These two related cases allowed us to see what the issues in growth management are for the major interest groups in the state, and to understand what they have been able to agree on and what sticking points remain. The cases also provided insight into the detailed processes and discussions that led to agreements, and to understanding the skills and tasks of a facilitator for this type of consensus building.

The one metropolitan effort that has produced a regional growth management plan, the *San Diego Regional Growth Management Strategy*, was created in response to passage of Measure C in San Diego County in 1988, calling for the formulation of such a plan. It involved a collaborative effort of the county's 18 cities and the county government, working under the auspices of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), to develop a regional growth strategy on a consensual basis. This case stood out in that local governments took the leading role and were able to reach substantial consensus. A draft strategy was produced and work continues on more detailed planning and implementation.

The *San Francisco Estuary Project* and its parallel, the *Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project*, formed a natural pair to examine. These massive consensus projects, conducted under the auspices of the federal Clean Water Act, brought together representatives of the federal, state, and local agencies whose actions affect major estuaries. The projects also included key private interests, such as environmental and business groups. Their purpose was to develop an assessment of the state of the estuary and prepare and consensually adopt a conservation and management plan for it. Like San Diego's, these cases involved a central consensus group and multiple issue-based groups, along with technical and public advisory committees. Although the primary focus is on water quality, land use and growth issues are integral to estuarine problems. Both these projects involved many of the same players and agencies that would be involved in implementing a regional growth plan. The advantage of examining two estuary projects was that there were enough similarities in structure and purposes that the differences could be particularly informative. These two cases also permitted us to examine

the role of technical information in consensus building, because the scientific characterization of the estuary and assessment of the scientific findings were central to each case. Both have produced a consensual management plan, along with a set of water quality indicators and scientific data about the status of the bay/estuary. Although implementation of the plans depends on the political will of the governor and on funding, the indicators the projects produced are already in use by regulators, with the effect of redirecting some priorities to the protection of water quality.

We also studied the consensus process that led to *Contra Costa County Measure C* in 1988. This was a self-organized collaboration of development and environmental interests, along with local officials and citizens, designed to prepare and pass a referendum for a sales tax that would support county transportation improvements. Measure C also included a provision for growth management and a companion bond issue for open space. The county is highly diverse economically and racially and is split into subsections (or regions, as they call them), which see their interests very differently. Thus the effort to bring both regions and interests together for this purpose is particularly instructive.

The *Natural Communities Conservation Planning* case in southern California was a natural choice because it is a major, precedent-setting effort by state agencies to be proactive and coordinate state, federal, and local conservation planning, while working with environmentalists and developers. Moreover, the area in question, the coastal sage-scrub habitat of the gnatcatcher and other rare species, covers portions of three counties and is under intense development pressure. The planning area involved approximately 6,000 square miles. The idea that united all the players was dislike of the species-by-species protection approach of the Endangered Species Act. They all saw potential benefits and greater certainty in a broader “natural communities” approach to wildlife protection. The state followed a three-step approach: first, at the regional level, stakeholders worked to reach consensus on guidelines and performance standards; second, state and federal agencies negotiated planning agreements with local governments on how subregional plans would meet these guidelines; and third, the stakeholders are now participating in the development of the subregional conservation plans. This case is unusual in our sample because state agencies took the lead. It is interesting because substantial agreement has been reached among players who have long been in conflict. One of its most effective methods was its reliance on a panel of scientific experts who were all acceptable to the stakeholders. The case presented here examines the first stage of this conservation planning process, which has reached completion.

The *Coachella Valley* case allowed us to look not only at the planning process but also at the implementation of a habitat conservation plan that had been developed consensually. This case allowed us not only to see how 14 local jurisdictions, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, local developers, and environmentalists managed to agree on a coordinated solution to the conflict between endangered species protection and development objectives, it also enabled us to see how consensus building played a part in implementation.

*Bay Vision 2020* was the major consensus-building effort in the San Francisco Bay Area to establish a regional growth policy and strategy. The commission drew its membership from a diverse group of leading citizens, most of whom had no growth management responsibilities.

They were chosen for their diversity and personal qualities rather than as stakeholders representing identified interests. The commission was not sponsored officially by any governmental agency, but rather by a voluntary group including key stakeholders in growth — the largest environmental group in the region, the most important business research organization, and a group of regionally minded locally elected officials. The purpose of establishing the commission was to educate these leading citizens and find a consensus among them about the nature of the regional growth management problem, and the need and direction for action. Then a small group — The Bay Vision Action Coalition, made up largely of the stakeholders who had sponsored the commission — used its findings and recommendations as the basis for drafting legislation for regional planning and governance. The proposal, to consolidate three major regional agencies and create a regional commission, turned out to be controversial, and was strongly opposed by many local governments in the region.

We briefly reviewed the equivalent effort in the Los Angeles region, the LA 2000 Committee and Partnership, which involved an elite group of powerful business, environmental, and community leaders in developing a vision first for the city, and then for the region. We also briefly examined the variety of regional bodies doing some type of growth-related planning for the Los Angeles area.<sup>10</sup> We combined these into a single discussion of the Los Angeles situation, exploring the inherent obstacles to creating a regional coordinating effort in an area that is so large and has so many strong, independent, and often competing agencies with no mandate or incentive to cooperate with one another.

*Playa Vista* is a massive development proposed for an area of Los Angeles sandwiched between middle-class residential districts near Marina del Rey. The project lies within the jurisdictions of Los Angeles city and county and the Coastal Zone Management Commission. It raises issues of wetlands, traffic impacts, and views, to name only a few. It has been debated for more than a dozen years, and repeatedly revised to suit its critics. As yet, building has not begun, though in the summer of 1993 many former opponents began to support the project and permits were given for the first phase. One city council member lost her re-election bid over the project, and it became a citywide cause célèbre. This project is our only example of a consensus-building effort around a development project, as most such projects do not meet our criterion of crossing jurisdictional lines.<sup>11</sup> This case, however, turned out not to have a face-to-face group process with all stakeholders involved simultaneously, but rather employed shuttle diplomacy by the developer among the interests and agencies.

Finally, *military base reuse planning* at *Fort Ord*, *George Air Force Base*, and *Mather Air Force Base* allowed us to examine attempts at interjurisdictional consensus building concerning redevelopment and base reuse planning.<sup>12</sup> These have been largely failed attempts<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Due to limitations of funding we were unable to do more than one or two interviews on these and to review documentary material.

<sup>11</sup> The Natomas project in the Sacramento area was an example of a complex development that was successfully negotiated through a consensus process after years of stalemate (see Michael Peter Smith), but many others remain in difficulty (Huntington Beach, Bolsa Chica, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> These studies were done independently of this project by Joshua Kirschenbaum and Dwayne March (op. cit.), so they did not adhere to all the common questions and methods used here. The methods of interviewing

thus far, although some have been more successful than others. They allow us to look at the issue of who convenes the consensus process, and at the problem created when some stakeholders have substantially more to gain or lose than others and thus do not accept a consensus process that does not recognize their special concerns. These cases cover only some aspects of our inquiry, as they were done independently of our project. We include them because they provide substantial parallels and insights for the present project.

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and the review of materials were similar, however, and they addressed a number of the same issues.

<sup>13</sup> Fort Ord has had some success since the preparation of this case, and planning seems to be moving ahead.

## FINDINGS

### Overview of Cases

Of the nine cases of consensus building that we examined in detail,<sup>14</sup> four had as a primary purpose preparing or working toward legislation, four aimed primarily at preparing a plan, and one focused on developing specific actions. Seven of the nine were preceded by an earlier working group that had set up the process.

All but two of the cases relied on subgroups in addition to a central committee. The size of that central group ranged from seven in one case to 54 for the largest group. Six ranged between 15 and 35 members. Four of the cases used technical advisory committees and two used special-purpose technical committees. Three set up issue-based committees, one used regional committees, and almost all used ad hoc short-term subcommittees at one time or another. These committees were all made up of diverse stakeholders, except in one case where “caucus” groups of similar stakeholders were created. Two cases had a higher-level “sponsoring” committee above the central committee.

The shortest process we examined took about eight months, and another took less than a year. The others ranged from a year and a half to five or six years. The shortest ones were regarded as incomplete, and other groups took up the work after the process we examined had ended. Two of the processes are continuing at this writing. At least four of the cases resulted in the creation of new consensus groups to follow up the work of the first group. (It is difficult, at times, to be certain if a new group is really continuing the work.) In at least four cases, other parallel or spinoff consensus groups were created outside the process to work on aspects of the issues.

Staff were provided in a variety of ways. In four cases the consensus-building group itself hired and paid at least some of the staff. Staff were also borrowed from state agencies (one case), the legislature (two), federal agencies (one), COGs, or councils of government (two), nonprofits (one), or local government (one). In two cases a developer provided staff. In several others, the group hired consultants to do special tasks. Most cases had a mixture of staff provided in different ways. The funding also came in different ways, with three groups raising their own funding from public agencies, foundations, and private interest groups. The EPA provided the funding for the two estuary projects, and a developer provided funding in another case. Typically, public agencies loaned their staff without charge to the groups.

The combination of stakeholders varied by group. At least four groups included almost a full range of possible stakeholder types, from state and federal agencies, local governments,

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<sup>14</sup> These include the Growth Management Consensus Project, the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, San Diego, Natural Communities Conservation Planning, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, the San Francisco Estuary Project, Coachella Valley, Contra Costa, and Bay Vision 2020.

and interest groups. Three others included no state or federal agencies, while one had a central committee made up entirely of local officials. Only two included social equity stakeholders, who are not normally part of the growth management debates.<sup>15</sup> These were representatives of the poor or ethnic minority groups who would be affected, albeit often indirectly, by growth management policies.

In at least five cases major parallel activities were taking place in other arenas, while in four cases the consensus process was really the central location for discussion. Technical fact-finding was a central feature in six cases, while only more-limited qualitative analyses were done in the others. The products of the consensus efforts were so varied that they cannot be summarized, but they included plans and legislation as well as indicators for monitoring strategies, guidelines for planning, surveys, and emerging agreements. The degree of success or failure of any one case cannot be simply measured, since all had some successes and all failed to accomplish all that was originally intended.

## **Stakeholders**

### **Selection Process**

Stakeholders joined these processes in several different ways. In none of our cases was membership predefined, although, in officially sanctioned governmental processes like San Diego's or the estuary projects, some stakeholders were suggested by the legislation. In many cases the players with the most at stake, often the initiators, selected themselves to start the process. In some cases, like Bay Vision, Coachella Valley, or the Growth Management Consensus Project, the initiators selected the group. Often a core group or project initiators later decided other stakeholders were needed, as they did in the San Francisco Estuary Project. They used personal and professional networks to identify individuals and active interest groups. Organizations coordinating the process, like SANDAG, also might choose stakeholders. Sometimes the organizers selected individuals who had good communication skills and commitment to consensus; sometimes they asked organizations to designate an individual to represent them; but often, especially in the early stages, the process involved the joint selection of an interest and an individual who could represent that interest. Growth Management Consensus Project staff, before inviting stakeholders to the table, "shopped their list around" Sacramento to assure they had incorporated all key interests. Prior to the San Francisco Estuary Project, public workshops were held to which a large number of likely participants in the project were invited and educated on the issues. Typically, the core group then moved to unite additional stakeholders soon after it began work. A public involvement committee assisted in this selection process.

We observed a combination of formality and informality in the selection process. In the interests of assuring that all who have power or major interest are represented, both self-selection and deliberate efforts to involve stakeholders seemed to be needed. This lack of a simple procedural rule or a priori set of members raised a dilemma of legitimacy for the

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<sup>15</sup> See Susan Sherry (1993).

process at times, though complaints only occurred in cases like the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program (NCCP), or San Francisco Estuary Project, where some interested stakeholders were left out. In the NCCP, which had no method for limiting involvement, when more and more people wanted to get involved they adopted a public hearing format.

### **Selection Criteria**

**Inclusiveness.** Most groups sought to include all active interests with a stake in the issue, recognizing the political importance of inclusion. In the words of one person involved in the Contra Costa process, “If you had an issue on the sales tax measure, we wanted you in the room. We wanted to get everyone in the room.” Many attribute the fact that so many groups supported (or at least did not oppose) the Contra Costa measure to the inclusivity of the process. Coachella Valley organizers followed a similar logic. In San Diego, the norm for all committees was to be inclusive. For some committees this meant including representatives of every jurisdiction within the county; for other committees it meant broadly representing interests in the county. As one staff member described it, “we want to bring all affected people into the tent.” He went on to explain that doing this made it easier to sell whatever product resulted from the group.

Staff decided the Growth Management Consensus Project needed to include all interests because they represented the legislature. However, they went beyond the obvious, active interests to invite inner-city and community-based groups, which have not played much role in growth politics and did not, at the outset, know what was at stake for them. Staff regarded the education of all the stakeholders about the “social equity” issues in growth management to be a major success of the project. With some success, The San Francisco Estuary Project, through the public involvement committee, also attempted to bring in stakeholders who had not previously played an active role in debates. Most groups did not go beyond seeking out the interests that were already actively involved, and making sure none were missing.

If a missing stakeholder had the capacity to be a deal breaker, the problem could be serious. The fact, for example, that local governments were missing from the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition (EERC) raises problems both for passage of the legislation and for effective implementation if passed. EERC efforts to represent local government interests through informal consultation and indirect representation will help, but may be insufficient to assure the support of local governments or to design a program that will work at the local level.

**Balance.** A concern for balance often led to the creation of very large committees. Although the literature on group process makes it clear that smaller groups (7 to 15) are most effective for consensus-building discussion, many of the central committees in the processes we studied became quite unwieldy, with as many as 54 people in one case and 30 to 45 in others. These committees grew in size despite the organizers’ recognition of the difficulty of managing large groups, partly to assure inclusion of interests, but also because of a concern for balance. Although these consensus processes seldom relied on majority voting and often required close-to-total agreement, both stakeholders and group organizers sought some rough

parity typically in the numbers of voices representing particular views. Thus, for example, the decision to include three business groups in the GMCP required that three environmental groups also be included.

Our respondents confirmed that balance was important and that they believed stakeholders should be represented in proportion to their roles. One local government representative who felt his interests were underrepresented in the Growth Management Consensus Project, stated, "I would have [arranged representation] so the cities and counties had much more weight." Representatives from conservation groups in San Diego were sensitive about being "tokens" on some of the advisory committees, even though they largely believed their views were being taken seriously by the business representatives. They felt they had to be better prepared than others to compensate. If key stakeholders had what they regarded as insufficient voice in relation to what they had at stake, they were likely to leave the process, especially if they had alternative arenas in which to operate. For example, in the case of George Air Force Base, a city that would be greatly affected by based closure contended it was underrepresented and prepared its own competitive plan to present to the military.

**Qualities of the Individual.** Respondents invariably told us it made a great difference which individual was selected to represent an interest. Some individuals were regarded as "reasonable" by the others, while a small proportion were seen as intransigent or irrational. Most organizers tried to assure selection of "reasonable" individuals as participants. As one participant in the Contra Costa case explained, while they sought to be as inclusive as possible in composing their citizens' advisory group, "People who wouldn't talk we didn't call." On the other hand, respondents frequently discovered that people who had come across as unreasonable and uncompromising at public hearings proved to be quite reasonable in the context of the consensus-building process. Yet, uncompromising or difficult people did get chosen at times, and they could block the work of the consensus process.

Looking across all the cases, we found no necessary relationship between intransigence and the stakeholder's interest. That is, even the stakeholder groups with interests that made them resistant to reaching agreements might well be represented by reasonable individuals. While the individual representatives could not change the fundamental interest of the stakeholder, they sometimes did change the stakeholder's position by reporting back on the consensus process and convincing the stakeholder that a modification in its position might be necessary. One of the business representatives to the Growth Management Consensus Process from a group that strongly opposed growth management, for example, convinced key association members that some type of land designation system would probably be developed, and began to build support for a designation system the members would find less problematic than the urban limit line that was under consideration. On other hand, a few individuals in the GMCP were so difficult that even their associates found them "outrageous," and regarded them as poor spokespersons for their cause.

The need of consensus groups to accept individuals designated by their organization as members to assure the backing of the organization, may mean that intransigent people prevent the reaching of significant agreement among the rest. Some organizers aimed to get "reasonable" participants, but as a result did not include points of view that would eventually



require attention. Facilitators, where they were used, generally had skills to deal with difficult players. But any demand for 100 percent consensus tended to give these players excessive power and drive the motivated players to a separate arena.

### **The Problem of Representation**

It mattered who the representatives were in relation to their organization. As one experienced facilitator explained it,

When principals are at the table, their decisions matter. You really need someone who can make a decision. The hard part is citizens' groups where you join by sending a dollar. Even if the representative is able to consult and return with commitment, there can always be a new splinter group that protests. The main thing people need is clarity about what a representative can commit to. They are often satisfied that staff will recommend to but not speak for council members or agency heads a priori.

Different individuals have different capacities to speak for an interest and to commit that group to action. Lobbyists are professional representers and often have formal meetings with their client organizations, as they did in the Growth Management Consensus Process and the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, to propose and get approval for positions they will take. They were sometimes able to bring the organization's leadership to an understanding of the issues and get the organization to shift its position to make achievement of consensus easier. But even these professional representatives often could not fully explain what they had learned to the members of the organization, and ran the risk of saying things in meetings that their organization would not accept, despite having full information. These lobbyists did not necessarily get agreement from their organizations for the positions they would take, because the complexity of the issues and process made it difficult and tedious for their organization members to learn enough to buy in to the conclusions. Lobbyists can get too far ahead of their group's views, as can any representative. In one meeting we observed, lobbyists were visibly nervous about a position they took, which they did not know if their organization would support. In another case, an individual who was a real leader in achieving consensus began to lose credibility among some group members because they thought he could not bring his organization along. Conversely, in another case, although group members knew that no one at the table could commit to a decision, trust and confidence were high because representatives had consistently done a good job of informing and bringing their constituency along.

High-level public agency staff can often speak for their agency, but they too have difficulty. One heavily involved participant in the San Francisco Estuary Project told us,

An agency is a consensus group. Internally the managers do not agree, but we try to iron out these differences and present a common face. Agencies do have policies but these are very general and could be given in one seven-word sentence. Different staff interpret it differently. For example, Joe has a different view from Paul. One is "fish sensitive" and the other is "politics sensitive." Both tried to represent their organization the way they saw it.

Local officials and their representatives had an even more difficult time because of the wide diversity of values and interests they represented — which, moreover, were typically poorly defined and internally in conflict. They could work well in groups with other local officials as they did in San Diego or Contra Costa, but when confronted with narrowly defined interest groups they often took weak, lowest-common-denominator positions. This was the case in the Growth Management Consensus Project, where local representatives insisted on funding for planning but did not provide leadership on growth management strategy. One representative to the GMCP noted that “LA 2000 found it hard to participate in this because they were already a consensus group.” Furthermore, local elected officials could not commit other members of their city council to any position they took. The problems of local governments differed in degree, but not in kind, from those of most other stakeholders who represented poorly articulated consensus groups. Local governments have substantial experience with communication and discussion on regional bodies and the League of Cities, but limited experience in these types of multi-interest groups.

Individuals who represented citizen groups with loosely associated memberships, such as the League of Women Voters, or those made up of associated community groups and individuals, like the Ethnic Coalition, were pretty much free to take a range of positions that might be reasonable for their group, but had considerable difficulty if and when they tried to get guidance from their organization. These citizen representatives were problematic from the point of view of stakeholders representing more formally organized interests, as they were less able than others to commit their membership to positions they advocated.

Some consensus groups were sensitive to problems concerning the relationship between a group member and his or her constituency, and tried to address it directly. For example, the ground rules for the Growth Management Consensus Project required the participants to communicate regularly with their stakeholder group, and the Coachella Valley process was based on the same understanding. At least one San Diego advisory committee made membership conditional on the establishment of some regular form of communication between members and their parent organizations. More typically, however, groups ignored the issue, at times with problematic consequences. In Contra Costa, for example, a key environmental representative in the consensus building process found himself at odds with his own group at least in part because he had not kept them sufficiently apprised of emerging decisions. In the end, several environmental organizations refused to actively support the ballot measure that emerged from the process.

Commissioners in Bay Vision 2020 did not represent interests directly, as this was not a stakeholder group. Commission members were selected as individuals, and were not officially responsible for reporting to agencies or interest groups. LA 2000 was a hybrid, with some members who might be viewed as stakeholders but most serving as individuals who could speak for certain points of view. These two groups were designed in the more traditional blue ribbon committee model, where the purpose is to provide leadership, visibility, and respectability for a proposal, rather than as a stakeholder model, which is designed to bring the key players into coordinated plans and actions.

### **Coming to the Table and Staying There**

After identifying stakeholders the next tasks were to get representatives to come to the table, to create the conditions to keep them there, and to provide the incentives for them to reach agreements. These problems existed for all cases. Even in the estuary projects, which were set up under federal law, and had official federal and state sponsorship, no rule defined which agencies or interests had to participate. Mandated processes such as the San Diego Regional Growth Management Strategy, the San Francisco Estuary Project, and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, did have the advantage that many public agencies began with the disposition to participate, and they and other players had reason to expect that what happened in the consensus process might have an impact on real policy. This was not a guarantee of participation, however. The Corps of Engineers chose not to participate in Santa Monica, for instance, and joined the San Francisco project late, though it has a significant role in coastal management. Other players who had formally agreed to participate did not necessarily attend. For example, local governments were formally members of the San Francisco Estuary Project, but few representatives actually attended meetings. In the Growth Management Consensus Project, the governor's office refused to participate, despite requests from organizers. As the reasons for declining participation tend to be politically sensitive, we were unable to get meaningful explanations. There are risks, however, in a consensus process. Key stakeholders often fear most participants will reach conclusions that they find unacceptable, giving them only the choice of public opposition to what others have agreed. The risks are particularly high for such players as the governor's office or the Corps of Engineers, because their presence in the group may imply agreement to implement. Some stakeholders believe they are better off reserving the right to decide after they see the results (see Cost-Benefit Calculations, below).

### **How the Processes Were Initiated**

For the nonmandated groups, there were two ways that participants first agreed to come to the table. In one model, a third party with some power and decision-making ability, as well as an interest in ending or avoiding conflict, initiated the group. Two of the base closure cases were started by the local congressman, and state legislative staff initiated the GMCP, with bipartisan legislative support. In these cases, players came in part because the sponsor had some power to implement what they agreed, and obviously an interest in their reaching consensus.

In the second approach, powerful parties with much at stake initiated the effort. They did so usually after years of conflict or stalemate, after concluding they could not change an unacceptable status quo unless they reached agreements with other key players. Thus environmentalists joined with development interests to initiate the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program (NCCP), Coachella Valley, and the Contra Costa efforts. In the first two cases, the combination of the Endangered Species Act and significant development opportunities in a fragile habitat area placed the players on a collision course involving costly litigation, delays, and uncertainty about outcomes. In the NCCP, the process failed to make progress until the state Resources Agency decided to take on leadership of the effort. In Contra Costa, developers and environmentalists saw that by teaming up, both could

achieve goals that neither alone had the political power or public support to achieve alone. In most cases, additional players, beyond the highly motivated core group, often had to be persuaded to join later. They did so in part because they saw the process gaining momentum and potentially having results.

### **Benefits of Participation**

The most important benefit of participation is the chance to shape a plan or policy. Thus, stakeholders needed to know that something specific would emerge from the effort: new legislation, a plan to guide agencies' actions, or a reduction in the conflict and the costs of litigation.

At times, direct financial benefits provided further incentives to participate. In Contra Costa County local governments that were reluctant to engage in growth management were induced to do so because some transportation tax money would be available for use on local projects only to governments that participated in growth management. Although this was the only case where direct monetary benefits were used as incentives for participation, local governments clearly are motivated by financing opportunities (they participate, for example, across the state in congestion management agencies because of the funding).

### **Costs of Participation**

There were also costs to participation. Participation takes time and energy, and organizations have to decide if they should use scarce staff resources for the effort. Just as benefits go differentially to groups with most at stake, costs too fall differentially. Depending on the resources of the group they may be prohibitive. Thus local governments, especially smaller and poorer ones, found the costs of sending representatives too high in most of our cases. Large jurisdictions like Contra Costa County or the City of San Francisco were among the few that could afford to send participants to the San Francisco Estuary Project, or even to monitor the program's activities. In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program, Riverside County chose to leave the process due to insufficient resources. Well-funded environmental organizations could participate and even send technically skilled professionals to represent them, as could many business and development groups. Less well-funded stakeholders sometimes sent citizens or elected officials, who could be effective participants. Groups with paid staff, however, could participate more consistently and more knowledgeably in some of the highly technical discussions that took place. In general, community-based organizations were at a disadvantage (though they were involved in few cases). In one case, the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition found funding to support travel to Sacramento for such organizational representatives because they had a commitment to the representation of these players. In other cases, such organizations were simply not at the table.

Another of the costs of participation that many stakeholders considered was that their participation could help to legitimize a process that would result in a worse outcome than the status quo. A stakeholder could join and become politically isolated, losing credibility. Ground rules requiring that consensus be defined as 100 percent were established in a number of our cases to reduce such a risk.

### **The Cost-Benefit Calculation for Participation**

Participation in a consensus process depends on stakeholders making an implicit cost benefit calculation. The first step is to assess their best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA), as it is termed in the negotiation literature.<sup>16</sup> That is, stakeholders estimate whether they will do better trying to reach agreement in the group or by working through the channels of power and influence they already have. For the environmentalists in the San Francisco Estuary Project this was a conscious process, as they were constantly calculating their alternatives. One of the key San Francisco Estuary Project staff noted that for environmentalists, “the compromise was simply to be at the table instead of in litigation.” One of the few people we interviewed who spoke out against consensus building was one of these:

I think consensus processes are the pits because the environment often loses. In the state wetlands consensus project, where the goal was to protect wetlands, the other interests [farming and agriculture] weakened the goal. I would rather it not be a consensus project. Majority rule results in a stronger document for the resource.

Our cases indicate that at least two major factors worked to convince potential players that their best alternative to negotiated agreement was such that participation in a consensus-building process was worthwhile: the likelihood that the prevailing state of affairs would be preserved, and the availability of alternative arenas for decision making.

**The Viability of the Status Quo.** Potential benefits are measured in comparison to the status quo. The status quo, even if not ideal, is at least known, and typically most stakeholders have learned to live with it. In most of our cases, only a few stakeholders at the outset were willing to risk changing from known problems to an uncertain future. When participants had reason to believe that the status quo was in fact unstable, however, then participation in a consensus-building process often became desirable as a way for them to affect the future. San Diego County, for example, had been faced with a spate of antigrowth ballot initiatives before beginning the Regional Growth Management Strategy. These made it clear that if stakeholders did not do something about growth, significant numbers of citizens might take action at the ballot box.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the default option became not the status quo, but potentially much more restrictive controls imposed through the initiative process, or at least an endless series of costly battles fighting those initiatives. The Growth Management Consensus Project arose in an environment of intense activity in Sacramento, after many bills had been introduced in the state legislature over several years, and when both candidates for governor stated that growth management was a priority. Though no bill had sufficient support to pass at the time, the participants knew that the future might well involve state level action in this area.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Moore (1986).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the history of ballot box planning in San Diego see Calavita (1992).

<sup>18</sup> Talbot’s 1988 study of environmental mediation also highlights the catalytic role of outside actors in bringing people to the mediation table. As he puts it, “The threat of losing money, or control, is a powerful stimulus for negotiation” (p. 93).

Once a consensus-building group is underway, the group itself becomes a threat to the status quo and thus a force that must be reckoned with. Even the opponent of consensus building quoted above chose to participate in the San Francisco Estuary Project. She explained, “If I had not been there, wetlands regulation would have been weakened.” The mandated nature of the SFEP and the fact that it was sponsored and led by the EPA, the principal federal regulator of water quality, created the worry among stakeholders that what emerged might become law. Thus many players participated in the project defensively rather than because they hoped for a solution of mutual gain. In response to the question, “What kept you at the table?” a state water agency official answered,

Fear. [He laughed] Feeling that we had so much at stake that we had to be there. We talked a lot about walking in some dramatic fashion, but we were afraid that [the] EPA would take over some regulatory power over state water issues. It was hard to say “we are not going to play.” The SFEP had substantial institutional structure, clout and recognition. We participated in a damage control mode throughout.

A business stakeholder explained his group’s participation in a similar way: It was going on with us or without us, we needed to be there. We couldn’t have stopped it. We are forced to play. Politically, it would look bad if we didn’t participate. The business and development community are perceived as land rapers who don’t want to compromise and just want the status quo.

The incentive to participate became even stronger in some cases after a critical mass of committed and important players was achieved, along with some first-stage agreements. At that point, reluctant players who thought they might be able to do better outside the process often joined because the potential of implementable results had become high enough. This clearly happened with the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition process. As the first small group began to reach agreements and produce preliminary legislation, other players sought to join. The choice for the latter became one of being in on the action or being left out in the cold.

**Alternative Decision Arenas.** The best alternative to negotiated agreement calculation has to deal not only with how important the process is likely to be, as a practical matter, but also with the alternatives the stakeholder has. When there were other arenas where players could bring their concerns or challenge decisions, the consensus process was undermined. Among those we studied, the San Francisco Estuary Project case was the most affected by the existence of parallel arenas where the same players were debating over the same issues, as happened in the water rights hearings at the state water board. The governor’s lack of commitment to implementing a management plan for the estuary led players to believe they would have a second chance to fight this out in Sacramento. They could seem to agree to the plan in the San Francisco meetings, or at least not stand in the way of consensus, but still lobby the governor and the legislature to remove the offending parts of the plan.

Similar dynamics occurred in the Growth Management Consensus Project, where a number of stakeholders would not join the process until they knew the Republican was elected

governor. They expected him to be sympathetic to their interests (unlike his opponent) and believed that he would offer an alternative arena where they could challenge unacceptable results from the GMCP. As in the San Francisco Estuary Project, the existence of other decision arenas meant that group members did not have incentives to reach agreements that required real change in their positions. In the base closure cases, the complexity of the remissioning process and the decision making authority of the military allowed dissident communities to believe they could do better negotiating on their own than they would in the group. In the Los Angeles area, the biggest obstacle to regional coordination is the multiplicity of overlapping and competing decision arenas and the fact that there is no structure to identify conflicting decisions or force resolution among them.

On the other hand, when it could be established that the consensus group was the place where the important action would be, this perception helped in getting and keeping participation. Support for consensus building from the government institutions that would have power to implement agreements was a strong factor in bringing people to the table and keeping them there. It was a major reason for participation in the estuary projects, for example, despite the alternative arenas and internal disagreements among state agencies. In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program, the leadership of the state resources agency and participation of the federal environmental agencies lent credibility to the process of negotiating the habitat plan. Even though some environmental groups did try to advance their agenda through legislation and litigation, the NCCP process had enough political credibility to remain the dominant arena, so they continued to participate.

### **Individual Motivations**

Participation was also dependent on whether the *individual* representing the stakeholder felt the benefits to him or her outweighed the costs. For the individual, the experience of participating matters. If it is disagreeable or unrewarding, the individual often can choose not to attend. Participants' enthusiasm and interest or lack of it influenced, in turn, the commitment of their stakeholder groups.

A major factor was that individuals often found participation in many of the consensus groups to be personally rewarding — often despite conflicts that took place. They regarded the groups as offering the opportunity for learning, as well as an avenue for making valuable professional contacts. It was an opportunity also to be part of something important, working with others. One participant in San Diego explained, “Professionally I have to work for a client. That limits my scope of work. Here I can speak freely. It’s a good outlet. I don’t have to defend everything I say. It’s fun.” Another participant reported that she attended meetings “because politicians and city managers were at the table. My work depends on who I know.” An active participant in the San Francisco Estuary Project, whose agency sent him, said, “I am an optimist. My involvement was because I think we can make something.” Our respondents repeatedly cited the processes of building personal networks and relationships, and the processes of joint learning and problem solving. These are central to keeping individuals at the table and committed to finding mutually acceptable answers.

Over time, as personal relationships and trust began to develop among at least some of the members, their incentives to stay increased. They had invested more and had more at stake.

They began to share a desire to have something to show for their efforts. They came to care about the group as well as the objective. As one SFEP player said, “I was willing to stay at the table, to try to understand others, to change my view, to stand aside for something I do not agree with. The group is more important than I am.”

There is a risk that participants’ enjoyment of the group and the desire to support the group effort can cloud judgment and lead individuals, in the interests of achieving consensus, to agree to things that their organizations will not support. Just that seems to have happened in Contra Costa. One participant admitted:

A lot of us got in over our heads technically. . . . Our enthusiasm for the process got away with us . . . It was so much fun reaching consensus, doing a big thing.

In that case, the organization this individual represented refused to support the agreement. In some other cases, such as the San Francisco Estuary Project and the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, some observers speculated that certain heavily committed participants, who led the effort, might not be able to bring their organizations along. This has yet to be tested.

For individuals, the location of meetings was also important to assure participation. Because the Growth Management Consensus Project was a statewide effort, the location of meetings was a problem, and their location alternated from south to north. The large distances in the 12-county San Francisco Estuary Project region also made participation difficult, but they too used the strategy of holding meetings in different places. Clearly this is a challenge for the Los Angeles region, where travel time and expenses are an even more significant factor than they are in the Bay Area.

For many individuals it was important to feel that they were working for something they believed in — something more than just getting benefits for their organization. Many told us they participated because “I’m interested in it,” and also because “I care about the Bay,” “I love San Diego” or, in the words of one of the most committed Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition participants, “It is a matter of pride as a native Californian. We always used to be ahead but we are not any more. I really believe we need to do better.” Similarly, a San Francisco Estuary Project participant who is involved in many regional activities explained he is involved “Because I have the time and I feel it is my duty. I am retired and I have a lot of knowledge. I am a lifetime Californian and I don’t like what is happening to the state.” While these feelings are probably not enough to assure an individual’s participation without other incentives, they played a significant part in the thinking of many who gave tremendous time to these processes. They cared and wanted to make a difference. Many of the processes ended up creating a sense of community and shared purpose among the participants, which they strongly valued.

### **Stakeholder Participation Patterns**

Some stakeholders left the processes, usually simply by not attending. We found no obvious pattern to who left and under what circumstances. Those who are paid to represent organizations with something obviously at stake were most likely to attend most diligently.



Citizens, especially those who were retired, housewives, or independently wealthy, were often diligent participants. Some participants ceased attending because they came to regard the process as not the best use of their time, or because they did not like the particular way the process was managed. Elected officials were most likely to disappear from the process except in Contra Costa and San Diego, where the main participants included local elected officials. In the San Francisco Estuary Project only 25–35 tended to come to meetings out of the nearly 50 members of the management committee, and elected officials were not in much evidence.

### **Managing the Consensus-building Processes**

A key feature of processes that result in agreements is that the participants, along with staff, take charge and design them in ways that they believe will fit their own problems, tasks, and players. Consensus-building processes were designed and managed in a variety of ways. Staffing, use of facilitators, various structures of working groups, types of tasks and products, and the procedures for discussion and decision were all combined in different ways in each of the cases. Moreover, members redesigned and adapted the processes over time. Often, one consensus group came to an end, only for another to emerge to continue the work. As both the literature and our respondents testify, participants are more likely to buy into processes and discussions over which they feel they have some control.

#### **Staffing**

Consensus-building processes require substantial staff assistance. In many of our cases organizers underestimated the needs, or simply did not have the resources to provide adequate staff support. One person, who ran a complex process almost single-handedly, identified four important functions to be filled by staff. Her list was supported by our observations in other cases. First, there are professional and administrative activities. Someone has to contact players, find meeting places, set up meetings, make sure information is prepared, keep track of what is going on inside and outside the process and generally figure out what the group needs to know, and deal with crises of various kinds. A second function is facilitation. A facilitator tracks issues, manages meetings, puts together agendas, talks to players in between meetings about their issues and generally tries to make sure that a positive discussion is possible, and assists in moving the group to reaching agreements. Third is a technical function. Someone needs to provide specialized information, whether it is scientific information about an ecological system, economic and fiscal analyses, legislative analyses, or the legal framework for action. Finally, clerical assistance is needed to prepare records of agreements, minutes and formal statements, keep information organized and accessible, answer phones, and so on.

Staff were important in each of the processes we examined, but their relationship to the process, the number of staff involved, and the source of funding for the staff varied considerably among the cases. We identified three basic patterns to the relationship staff had to the consensus-building process, with considerable variation within each pattern and overlap among them. In the first pattern the process was basically staff led. In these cases staff generated proposals, set meeting agendas, and did all the supporting analytic work. San Diego

is probably the best example of this. In the second at least some staff served largely as informal mediators among participants. In these cases staff worked hard between meetings, keeping players engaged and satisfied with the process, often doing informal consensus building outside meetings to prepare proposals that could be consensually adopted in the meetings. Contra Costa, the Growth Management Consensus Project, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program, and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project all provide variations on this pattern. In the fourth pattern staff served as assistants to participants who themselves had technical expertise. San Francisco provides an example of this kind of arrangement, where staff played a more reactive role, providing background information as requested and relying on participants' expertise. In all cases, however, staff were important in creating and managing the process, working out what needed to be done, and suggesting ideas to committees or the committee chairs, as well as in framing and presenting background information that inevitably influenced the players who were not knowledgeable on a topic.

There was also considerable variation in the number of staff involved in each of these processes, by and large independent of the role the staff played. Some cases, like Contra Costa, were staffed by only a few individuals, and the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition went for many months without staff at all. At the other extreme, the San Francisco Estuary Project had up to 17 staff at different times, and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project also had a substantial number. Yet in some cases, like the Growth Management Consensus Project and Contra Costa, one or two staff members put in far more than normal working hours, doing everything needed to make the process work.

Finally, there were significant differences in how staff positions were funded. Some processes relied heavily on technical work by outside consultants, as did the San Francisco Estuary Project. In other cases, the sponsoring agency provided staff, as SANDAG did for the Regional Growth Management Strategy and the EPA did for the San Francisco Estuary Project. The Growth Management Consensus Project and Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition staff director/facilitator raised the funding for her own salary, and the legislature loaned several staffers part time to each of these efforts. In Contra Costa a consultant played a major role as staff, but few players knew who paid him.

We could find no one staffing pattern or style of work that was obviously associated with greater effectiveness in consensus building, nor even with greater participant satisfaction. In general, most participants expressed support, respect, and appreciation for staff regardless of what they did. Staffing and facilitation of the meetings made a significant difference to the quality of participants' experience. A participant in the Contra Costa effort credits part of its success to the staff's effort to make it enjoyable. The fact that SANDAG staff, who were widely trusted among local governments and regarded as technically competent, provided ample support for the Regional Growth Management Strategy process was clearly a factor in the support local governments gave to that process.

Where staff work was irregular or where documentation and agendas were not provided efficiently, however, participants became irritated, as they did in Natural Communities Conservation Planning. This seemed to contribute to the atmosphere of tension and distrust rather than alleviate it, even though the reasons for the problem almost certainly lay in the agency's lack of experience in managing such processes. A state official said the California

Department of Fish and Game was not “institutionally prepared” for the task. Where staff were employed by one of the interested parties, we found some mistrust. In the Growth Management Consensus Project at one time, participants discussed sending the legislative staff away because some feared they represented the Senate and Assembly leaders. Business and other nonenvironmental interests did not trust EPA staff in the San Francisco Estuary Project because they regarded them as pro-environment. A high-level EPA administrator agreed. “Our staff are typically pro-environment advocates in the first place.” Only a handful of respondents in all of our cases, however, complained of staff bias.

Although staff support was essential to all of the processes we looked at, we also found that there is an important yet difficult balance between the need for staff to make the process work and the need for hard work by group members in order for them to take ownership of the process. If participants feel that they are simply acting as a sounding board for staff, as a few in San Diego did, their commitment to the product may be weak. One San Diego task force member, for example, believes that some of her fellow committee members did not take the process seriously because “Staff did most of the work.”

### **Facilitation**

In most of the cases we studied the facilitation function was handled primarily by the committee chair and regular staff. In some cases, however, a neutral facilitator was employed to assist participants in reaching agreements over particularly contentious issues.

The training and tasks of facilitators varied. Sometimes someone without professional facilitation training played this role, perhaps employed by one of the parties. In other cases (including the San Francisco Estuary Project and San Diego), committee chairs were trained in facilitating meetings. Other processes, such as the Growth Management Consensus Project and the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, hired facilitators to run meetings. In still other cases, a group would hire a facilitator to help with specific tasks. In the SFEP, for example, a scientist/facilitator ran a workshop of scientists from different agencies and disciplines to reach agreement on the controversial question of selecting an appropriate indicator of water quality. Another facilitator assisted the land use subcommittee in resolving its contentious issues. In the latter case the divided committee managed to reach a consensus on the land use component of the management plan. And, at the end of the SFEP process, a team of facilitators helped the management committee reach agreement on the wording of the final plan. The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project sponsored a facilitated process for the Malibu Canyon watershed area because of the serious contention among land owners and other players in that area.

Facilitators provided several forms of assistance. First, they assured that all the players’ views were heard. Second, they kept track of issues, statements, sticking points and agreements in written form, so players could see them and feel they were making progress. Third, they encouraged the reaching of agreements in a variety of ways, including reframing the language, separating issues, and reducing the range of the disagreement to more-limited points. When participants in the Growth Management Consensus Project were at loggerheads on the desirability of an urban limit line, for example, the facilitator was able to partially resolve the problem by getting agreement that there would be some sort of land designation

system. At the San Francisco Estuary Project, a “computer facilitator” helped to further discussion by typing proposed text for the plan and displaying it on a large computer screen for all the participants to see. This meant that changes could be made to the plan on the spot and participants could consent immediately to complex policy language.

With only a few exceptions, players greatly appreciated the work of professional facilitators and believed that the person was essential to their work. One participant described the group’s facilitator as “fantastic. She kept us moving along. She recorded our agreements, so we had a sense of accomplishment and we did not have to go back over old ground.” A San Francisco Estuary Project participant said the outside facilitators were “Critical to the success of the project.” Even one of the most disgruntled of SFEP players said, “the facilitators were skilled and did a really credible job. Otherwise the meetings would have been totally out of control.” In one case, a facilitator was sent away by a group who did not like his methods and felt he was not knowledgeable enough of the people or issues. This group continued with another facilitator whom they trusted more and who responded to their concerns.

Professional facilitators often had to perform a tricky balancing act between encouraging agreement but not forcing it. The enthusiasm and “can do” attitude of the facilitator clearly inspired and encouraged many players to keep working at agreement, in several cases. Sometimes, however, they pushed very hard, and contributed to a sort of peer pressure for agreement, as the facilitator did on the last day of the SFEP. The problem is that agreements reached under pressure may not hold up over time.

Some players contended that facilitation should be done by a member of the committee:

I think it is better if a member of the committee does it. People should be trained in these skills at conferences. People can be more useful if they can do this. But I think you are better off if people in the know facilitate.

Others felt it was important at least to have a facilitator who knew the issues substantively, so they could help with language and concepts and garner more respect.

### **Ground Rules**

Ground rules about behavior, voting, and discussion methods played an important part in the success of some of the processes we studied. In several cases groups developed ground rules at the outset. In the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, for example, participation was contingent on agreeing to the “first principles” for managing growth. Early meetings of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project focused on writing the group’s bylaws. In the Growth Management Consensus Project participants agreed not to lobby on the issues outside the group and agreed not to report to the press on the activities of others. As one member explained,

We had to have a policy of check your guns at the door. You have to have initial trust that this will be the main arena where things happen. You will get information in this process about the players and their bottom lines. This process will not work if you are going to use this information outside against other players.

One of the most important rules was usually about how to establish consensus. Some groups, like the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, sought 100 percent agreement and attempted not to bring forward issues until staff felt they had unanimous support. In Bay Vision 2020 consensus rules were never explicit, but the project director and chair only regarded decisions as acceptable if they had an overwhelming majority of support, and they seldom took votes. The Growth Management Consensus Project had to establish a 100 percent rule to define consensus in order to get to the table players who feared that their vital interests might be harmed without such a rule. This 100 percent consensus, not surprisingly, turned out to be impossible to achieve, so they produced “emerging agreements” that were supported by 85 to 95 percent of players.

### **First Steps**

Practices varied tremendously as to what groups did as first steps to get the discussion going. Some tried to get agreement on what the issues were. Others defined mission statements and goals. Still others tried to get agreement on the nature of the problem, at times concentrating on the development of technical descriptions. A few operated as committees of the whole to do most of the work, whereas others delegated responsibility to smaller groups, organized in a variety of ways.

The Growth Management Consensus Project immediately began to identify the issues, in part on the basis of four position papers prepared by the staff. Some disagreed with that procedure, believing the group should have focused first on defining the problem. As one said, “We should have sat down and decided what is the problem and what do we have to do to fix it. We never did that.” Some other groups did start with a problem definition, such as in the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program, where the problem was defined as how to protect natural communities, rather than individual species, without preventing development. Still, when the group began dealing with this problem definition, they found it was too simplistic and had to continue working on it. In other cases, there was no agreement on a problem definition until much later. In the San Francisco Estuary Project, for example, the decision on how to measure water quality near the end of both estuary projects de facto defined the problem.

One approach that usually was noncontroversial and often produced considerable narrowing of differences was to begin with an effort to define the situation in technical terms. This could lead to agreement about value-laden issues like the nature of the problem, and discussion of the basic values at stake. The experienced facilitator/director of one process explained:

What we did was to start talking about the problem rather than the goals and feelings — focusing on what are the growth rates and so on. If rational people look at the same information they will have a lot of agreement. The information might be challenged, but you argue with science, not each other. We made people vote on the information. This means, in effect, developers have to agree that wetlands are a problem and in danger and important. They do not have to agree on how important they are, but this is a first step.

In this stage the ethical issues may come up, like whose problem is growth anyway. Is it ethical for slow growth people to impose their views?

The value of joint fact-finding and agreeing on the data showed up in a number of other cases, as discussed in the section below on intellectual capital. In the San Francisco case, the issue committees' first tasks were to supervise the preparation of status and trends reports on pollution, dredging, wetlands, and so on. Although the expert participants said these reports did not produce new information, they did help the groups to agree on the nature of the problem and its seriousness. The process was both a learning exercise and a consensus building one. Participants in some sense negotiated over what they would count as facts. The Natural Communities Conservation Planning scientific review panel gave the science legitimacy in the eyes of participants because they all accepted the panel as neutral. In the Coachella Valley, experts reframed the issue in part as one of protecting the sand source for the habitat — of protecting a dynamic *system* — rather than simply protecting a parcel of land.

In San Diego, the work of several committees began with developing technical information. The information demonstrated to all group members that a problem existed. One staff member described the process as it worked in the technical committee:

We show them a problem. “We have to fit 3.7 million people into the region in 2015. Your general plans show that would be forcing a large number of dwellings into the back country, into unincorporated area, because your general plans won't accommodate the growth.” They realize that having a large number of dwellings in unincorporated areas is unrealistic. It will be translated into demands for plan changes. Then the question becomes how to plan for that now. We prove to them that there is a problem. We can't just say SANDAG staff thinks there is a problem.

Other committees working on the regional growth management strategy in San Diego also started work by using data to document that a problem really existed. The economic strategy committee had to begin by developing a common understanding of the health of the economy, which they did by developing comparative data. The data painted a picture of an economy in decline, and forecasts projected a stagnant standard of living. A committee member explained,

For the most part, people in the end accepted the data. The data compared San Diego to different cities. It examined the quality of life. You need something like this so that you can monitor. The dependence of the region on the defense industry became apparent.

Similarly, the first task of the committee working on regional infrastructure was to survey the extent of infrastructure needs. At some level members all knew that there were needs, but that knowledge was neither salient nor specific. The data the committee collected made it both. One committee member argues, “It was good for the region to confront it. It was a great exercise. We needed to acknowledge the shortfall in infrastructure capacity.”

### **Conduct of Discussion**

For the most part, participants reported that even where no professional facilitator was used, those chairing meetings made a systematic attempt to hear the points of view of every member. They tried to assure an environment in which individuals were all treated with equal respect, although some individuals did come to dominate discussion. As the chair of one committee in San Diego explained,

What we try to do is accommodate people's interests. And the first thing you have to do is get everybody to tell you what they are. We've got to be sure everybody is heard. I protect anybody that's in a diverse position. I thank them for their input and inquiry and validate their issue and concern . . . We don't discount anybody.

A business stakeholder described the Growth Management Consensus Project by saying, "The rules were not to make assumptions about what others think but to be open-minded and listen."

Creating this kind of positive environment could be very difficult, given the history of contentiousness in many of our cases. As one group leader commented:

This is a very difficult group, hard-edged, used to fighting things out . . . I like them personally, but I do think they are difficult to deal with. They don't think twice about stabbing someone in the back. This is not like a set of school teachers. These are high level people and overimpressed with what their time means.

When the facilitation process worked well, at least during meetings, the force of the argument became more important than the power of the agency an individual represented. As one participant in the San Francisco Estuary Project commented,

I noticed that the power and prestige of individuals faded as people sat there over time. The deputy director of the agency had no more clout than the Audubon society. The organization behind the person faded after a while and it became just two people — bricks banging into each other. The heat affected the whole room and eventually brought compromise.

Some of the facilitators and chairs tried to use the concept of "principled negotiations," which says that the goal should be to move players away from fixed *positions* about desired outcomes and instead get them to identify their underlying *interests*. Negotiation experts claim that this approach is more likely to lead to resolution of issues as it is more flexible and may lead to opportunities for mutual gain.<sup>19</sup> For example, from this perspective, developers should identify the ability to build and make a profit as their interest, instead of insisting on the position of opposition to urban limit lines. Since this interest might be achievable in many different ways, including within a land designation system of some type, pursuit of the interest and not the position would allow more room for reaching consensus. Similarly, environmental-

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<sup>19</sup> This is described in Fisher and Ury (1981).

ists, instead of insisting on the position that urban limit lines must be created, could identify their interest as creating greater certainty for the protection of habitat, natural resources, or open space. One key leader of the San Francisco process told us, “Principled negotiations are crucial. . . . [They offer] a broad framework.”

### **Working Groups and Committee Structures**

All but one of our cases (Bay Vision) used multiple working committees that reported back to a central committee. Much of the real consensus-building work was done in these committees, whose design and structure varied from case to case, depending on the issues. These committees might be made up of some members of the central committee, but most often included additional people. The central committee was sometimes very large, but these committees were typically closer in size to the number considered by experts on group process to be most effective for discussion and reaching agreement. In most cases these groups did the detailed discussion and analysis of issues and brought back recommendations. Consequently, these committees involved the participants more deeply than the larger groups and engaged them in a more personal way with other members.

These committees appear to have been essential to fulfill the complex agendas of the consensus processes. They spread out the work, permitted participants to become really expert on some aspects of the problem, and allowed in-depth consideration of issues. Inevitably, however, they increased the need for coordination and communication, requiring greater levels of staff support.

We identified five types of committees that were combined in various ways in the cases. First, all cases had a central decision-making committee — usually the largest group. Several had technical committees. Two or three had committees that functioned as public advisory groups. Several created issue-focused committees, and one relied on caucus and cross-caucus groups. All types of the committees except the last were made up of stakeholders representing diverse perspectives.

Technical advisory committees composed of technically trained agency and interest group staff representing different perspectives were used in several cases. Their task was to define and review technical information and to do so in a way that gave it legitimacy and credibility for use in the process. Diversity of expertise and perspectives was important on these committees because, as noted above, agreement on information can define the problem and set the direction for the project. In San Diego, a technical committee composed of planners and city managers from all SANDAG jurisdictions drafted the Regional Growth Management Strategy. The Natural Communities Conservation Planning program and San Francisco Estuary Project both also established special groups of scientists representing different viewpoints to address particularly contentious issues. In the NCCP such a panel of scientists defined what coastal sage habitat was, defined qualities of habitat, determined how much habitat could be potentially lost, and specified guidelines for collecting data and designing systems of preserves and corridors. In the SFEP a diverse group of scientists agreed on an overall measure of water quality, the use of which would need to significant changes in state



water policy. In both cases these committees produced widely accepted conclusions that affected the direction of the main consensus group.

Public advisory committees were also set up in some of the processes we studied. These committees functioned, as in the estuary projects, to oversee public information efforts. More importantly, they were to make sure that key stakeholders in the community were identified and involved. In Contra Costa, for example, the Transportation Partnership Advisory Committee served this function as it became a forum for building consensus among all interested parties in the county.

Issue-based committees were the most common and effective use of working groups. In San Francisco, for example, the management committee identified six issues, such as wetlands, pollution, and land use that required special attention, and set up committees for each with membership including knowledgeable participants representing the important different perspectives on the topic. These committees supervised the preparation of status and trends reports on their issues and prepared the basic language for the final management plan on their topic. They had heated and intense debates and in some cases required facilitators, but when they did reach agreement, the larger committee was basically prepared to accept it. In San Diego three such issue committees were created, on regional public facilities, open space, and economic strategy.

The Growth Management Consensus Project chose a model for working groups that was unique in our cases. They divided members into caucuses, each representing an interest (e.g., developers, environmentalists, local government, social equity), rather than set up diverse issue-oriented groups. These caucuses were charged with developing positions on a set of issues. After they had met for a period, they met in cross-caucus discussion to resolve the differences between two caucuses. Thus the environmentalists would first decide on their own concerns, then meet with developers to see if they could find common ground. They would then report their conclusions to the larger central group. GMCP members had asked for this structure because, although the group had quickly agreed on what the issues were, many stakeholders who had not previously been involved in growth management debates felt unprepared to discuss these issues. They preferred to do their learning with a group that they believed was generally sympathetic.

This was not an uncontroversial approach. One supporter found the caucus a “brilliant” strategy for resolving differences, and many participants generally found it useful. But a contrasting view was expressed as well:

It was fatal to organize people in caucuses. The GMCP was flawed in design from the start and doomed to failure. The organizing principle of caucuses which were set up right away was designed to get special interests to come together and figure out what their interest in growth management was. It gave them the time and opportunity and encouragement to identify their own self interest (as opposed to identifying their shared interests).

This caucusing method may have delayed or made more difficult the achievement of common ground among the group as a whole. However, it may have been a necessary strategy in the

context of this process, which had brought in players new to the issues. Another alternative that creates less risk of divisiveness is for moderators to work individually with stakeholders for weeks, even months, before beginning the process to help them determine their own interests. This method was not used in any of our cases, but mediators we spoke with told us they have done it in other cases.

A further complication of this caucus method was that issues were assigned to caucuses so stakeholders got to discuss some issues in depth, but not others. This made for some dissatisfaction because the larger group was not the most important forum for issue discussion. One local government representative complained,

They threw cities and counties and regional governments into a group. We had trouble agreeing on a governing structure and membership. We had a hard time coming up with consensus. They did not put us into meaty issues. They gave these to environmentalists and developers. I wanted to get into land use and urban growth boundary issues and phased development, but we only discussed this in the large group. But by the time the issues go to the large group a lot had been decided that many of us were not privy to. Things had already been hashed out in other committees.

Other working group structures also were used in our cases. Small ad hoc committees representing different views had prepared agendas for the Growth Management Consensus Project and wrote draft legislative language in the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition. In Contra Costa, a small group made up of key stakeholders served as a preliminary consensus-building body whose agreements were then brought to the full advisory committee.

Overall, the use of working groups was important for the consensus-building processes we looked at. Small group discussion is widely recognized to be more effective<sup>20</sup> than large groups, and players in a number of cases said that the peer pressure for participants to come well prepared was higher in small groups. Moreover, these groups often achieved a sense of shared responsibility, which created the desire to reach agreement (although, of course, small size offered no guarantee of agreement). On the other hand, decisions worked through in detail in the small groups could not always be translated or fully accepted in the larger group. Still, where small groups were known to be representative of divergent viewpoints, the larger group tended to basically accept their work, though often with changes.

### **The Mix of Stakeholders in Groups**

Working groups made up of stakeholders of similar type seemed to be more effective than mixed ones. Members spoke with more respect of each other. They seemed better able to establish a mutually satisfactory discourse. Thus San Diego, with committees made up almost entirely of local elected officials or of agency staff, seemed to generate mutual understanding despite the differences of interests among cities. The lobbyists representing organized interests,

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<sup>20</sup> Both psychology and business literature amply document the ideal nature of groups of five to 10 for productive discussion.

who were the principal members of the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition understood one another despite the highly conflictual interests they represented. Generally, technical advisory committees or scientific panels worked effectively together, even where scientists came from different disciplines or agencies with conflicting perspectives. At least they spoke a common language and applied common criteria to assessing information.

When the technical people in the San Francisco Estuary Project were mixed with citizens and managers on the issue committees, technical participants were frustrated. As one noted, “Some citizens had little at stake and little scientific understanding. The stuff is pretty damn technical. Of the nearly 50 people on the management committee only four or five really understand the technical issues.” These members were often impatient with citizens’ “anecdotal” evidence and with the manager members’ insistence on incorporating management options into the status and trends reports instead of sticking to the scientific facts. Citizens and interest group staff tried to incorporate conclusions about how badly off the bay was, but the technicians resisted such normative judgments.

In the estuary projects the mixture of elected officials, citizens, and paid agency and interest group staff produced a number of asymmetries. Those whose job responsibilities included participation attended more regularly than citizens and elected officials. This situation also led to an asymmetry of knowledge among stakeholders, as paid staff could and did take the time to become better informed than most elected officials, who typically not only had many other issues to deal with, but also had full-time jobs in addition to their elected positions.

Overall, local elected officials seemed not to mix well with other types of players, nor to be able effectively to represent the concerns of local government in such mixed groups. Local government representatives were not influential participants in the Growth Management Consensus Project or the estuary projects, although they were ostensibly members. While this, especially in the San Francisco Estuary Project, could be attributed to lack of attendance, staff support, and knowledge, an important factor in both cases seemed to be the asymmetry of their responsibilities in comparison to other stakeholders. As discussed earlier, a city official has to represent a broad consensus across many views. A representative of local government claimed, “GMCP brought in stakeholders tangential to the process — legal aid lawyers who sue on housing issues. They have little interest and little to lose.” A lobbyist for the League of Cities has to represent the lowest common denominator across many differing jurisdictions. Moreover, local governments are at the center of growth management. They had much at stake but could not take the narrow and effectively focused positions that could be taken by those representing a singular interest.

In addition, there was a mismatch between the political rhetoric of some elected officials (who were often sent as local representatives) and the professional language and demeanor of paid staff. Other players were often impatient, even contemptuous of local players in the Growth Management Consensus Project and San Francisco Estuary Project, calling them “whiners” and “ideologues.” Local officials frequently represented the deeply held views that land use control is and should always be a local function, while many of the other players started with the belief that local land use control is the cause of the problem. This basic difference in style and substance made it difficult to achieve the mutual understanding and respect necessary for identifying and resolving differences. Representatives of local

government did far better in working out their positions and needs in groups made up of other elected officials or their staff.

### **Self-organization**

Each of the processes we studied had its own dynamic and its own unique form. Most of them evolved in structure and focus during their existence. The members in all of our cases, with the assistance or guidance of staff, established the agenda, structure and procedures, as well as the boundaries of the issues and selection of other members. In the Growth Management Consensus Project the group quickly rejected one facilitator and decided the members representing related interests needed to meet in caucuses. During the course of the meetings they decided what their product would be like. In San Francisco, members decided which issues should have committees assigned to them and invited new stakeholders into the process once they began. In the Coachella Valley and Contra Costa cases there were no external mandates, and the players ran the process completely. In San Diego the SANDAG board added a ninth element to the Regional Growth Management Strategy, about the strength of the economy, and a new committee to work on it, after business groups complained about its absence in the original draft.

Participants often challenged arbitrary, or even carefully considered, decisions to keep certain issues off the table. The groups demanded the chance to consider the issues that were declared out of bounds after they had concluded that the issues were relevant. For example, the San Francisco Estuary Project organizers' decision not to address flows issues could not be maintained, as the players concluded they could not solve water quality problems without looking at the question. Similarly, the decision that the Mather base should remain an airfield later had to be reopened. Although information on real constraints was important to the participants — for example, on what the law would allow or on the political realities that the project faced — even these constraints were sometimes challenged as a result of deliberations. For instance, a participant in the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project played a part in preparing amendments to the Clean Water Act to remove some of the constraints that act had imposed on the process, such as time deadlines.

A priori limitations on what could be discussed were inconsistent with the open ended, problem-solving character of the processes we examined. The ability to control and shape their own process, committee structure, and agenda were important to keeping players at the table. This control gave the players a sense of empowerment and ownership of the process, thus engaging them more deeply and committing them to seeking results. It gave them the opportunity to use their own knowledge of local players, organizations, and controversies and to design a process and set of tasks to fit these.

### **Strategies for Reaching Agreement**

The search for consensus meant that taking a vote at some arbitrary point was not a legitimate way of reaching closure. Most, if not all, members needed to agree. Often, however, groups could start making decisions by identifying those points on which agreement was easy. Sometimes discussion led to new approaches that powerful players saw to be in their interest

to adopt. At other times discussion led to such broad support for a position that it became difficult for opponents to prevail. This happened in the San Francisco case, when the agreement among participants that water quality was intimately linked to the issue of water flows made it more difficult for state water agencies to contend that the two issues were separable. Sometimes the discussion convinced those with minority views that the position they were taking would never prevail. Under those conditions, representatives sometimes persuaded their organizations to identify a more feasible position. In general, the desire to have something to show for the months or years of hard work, along with the desire to be supportive to the group with which they had developed working relationships and some common cause, proved to be important incentives to reach agreement.

One pressure to compromise was the desire of key players to maintain the group's legitimacy and to obtain broad support for any proposals. When this was the case, concern for legitimacy could lead powerful stakeholders to defer to politically weaker ones. For example, social equity as a value showed up in all the Growth Management Consensus Project and Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition outputs in spite of the fact that social equity groups were generally newcomers to the growth management issue. One social equity stakeholder in the former told us, "Other stakeholders were very afraid we would walk. It was important to them not to have this happen and for the legislators to know it. In general this prospect was worse than giving in."

Another pressure to agree was created in the San Francisco Estuary Project, where the group decided that no member could write a minority report unless that member supported the plan as a whole. This incentive was held out to the farming lobbyist when he indicated reluctance to add his voice to consensus on the plan's adoption. If he did not agree, he would not have the opportunity to put farmers' concerns about wetlands policy into the report, and five years of work would be of dubious value.

Where players had long been caught in unproductive conflict, introduction of new stakeholders could change the dynamic of the debate. An example was given by one member of the GMCP:

It was good getting the social equity people together with the environmentalists and development interests and others usually involved in growth management debates. Many of us are lobbyists and we know each other well and have already staked out positions. This takes away from ability to build consensus. But to throw in new people was a plus. You really had to think about what you are doing to them. So it brought in a new issue that all of us could start thinking about and that framed new consensus areas.

In the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, where the discussion went further into depth and specifics than it did in many of our other cases, participants often discovered that an agreement that they had been able to reach in principle actually masked significant problems. In the earlier Growth Management Consensus Project process, which didn't allow time for this detailed discussion, one stakeholder noted, "We did not get specific enough to see exactly how it would work. The discussion was more at the philosophical level."

In contrast, the EERC, with at first about seven members and eventually as many as 15, worked on legislative language over a period of more than a year of weekly lunch meetings and day-long facilitated workshops. In the process of looking at concrete and specific implications of alternative wording, members changed their positions. A small subcommittee would bring in proposed language for a section, and the members would discuss it, bringing in their own expertise. As they outlined the scenarios that might result, early agreement sometimes disintegrated because members saw the proposal would have unintended consequences. For example, participants who had originally supported bureaucratic enforcement of local plan consistency requirements came to see that self-certification might be a desirable alternative because of the legal difficulties of enforcing plan consistency.

In the San Francisco Estuary Project, the EPA hired a facilitator expressly to help the management committee rewrite the draft management plan (which had been written by staff and smaller committees). The emphasis inevitably was on “wordsmithing.” After someone would disagree with a word, the group would search for another until one could be found that did not immediately bother any of the players. Then they moved on to the next section. One critic said this meant the focus was almost always on the language rather than the content of the policy. “We got at the end, rather than substantive dialogue, debate and consensus on wording,” noted a leader of the process. Another facilitator critiqued this approach on the ground that it did not allow tradeoffs among issues, because it went over the report one section, or even sentence, at a time. Although the management committee agreed to language for the plan, a number of important participants contended consensus was thin. They had not decided whether to support the plan until moments before the final vote, and then only because some allies supported it. The fact that key players were highly uncomfortable with parts of the plan seems problematic for its future implementation.

### **Duration of the Consensus-building Process**

Consensus building takes time — not just months, but years. Many of the processes we studied brought together stakeholders who had long seen their interests in conflict, who had sharply different perceptions of problems, and who deeply mistrusted one another. Respectful interaction over time was necessary to overcome these differences and begin to establish trust. Getting to know each other personally was important. The group as a whole needed to review its charge or, as in most cases we studied, invent its charge. They had to decide how to proceed, to explore the viewpoints of each participant, and to try to understand the complex situation they faced before they could even define the issues, much less reach consensus on a policy or action. Meetings typically had to be several hours long, as players worked through their concerns and understandings. Sometimes retreats and weekend-long meetings were needed. Intervals between meetings were required for players to reflect and talk over issues, for information to be gathered on issues raised, and for materials to be reviewed. In addition, the players themselves almost all had other jobs and responsibilities, and could only spare so many days or hours each month.

In all of our cases, just getting started took more time than many anticipated. As one experienced participant recalled, “You get everyone to agree on an agenda. It may take a year.”

A San Francisco participant said, “At the end of a year we had not even defined the playing field. We drank a lot of coffee and tried to figure out the problem . . . Scientists on the technical advisory committee spent two years deciding on the problem just among themselves.” The two cases where the initial process was limited to less than a year — Contra Costa and the Growth Management Consensus Project — both had difficulties. Although Contra Costa players did agree on action and joint support for an initiative, the eight-month process did not allow some of the implications of the proposal to be fully explored, and some players were later disillusioned by results. In the GMCP, in 10 months there was agreement on what the issues were and, at least among many players, on general directions for action, but members had not formulated specifics of legislation, and many serious sticking points were not addressed. One participant explained,

We kept looking for consensus. We got shorter and shorter lists and areas of emerging agreement. But 10 months was not long enough. It needed at least 18 months. Might be much longer.

In both cases, continuing group processes were needed before agreements on specifics could be reached.

The time it took to build meaningful consensus depended on a variety of factors, including the experience of the participants in working together, the degree of trust and shared purpose they had developed, and the degree to which they already relied on common information. In San Diego, for example, local officials and staff had worked together over a 20-year period and already shared the view that they were all part of a region with common concerns. They also could build on an existing information base created by SANDAG. In San Francisco, on the other hand, many of the players had never sat together around a table, and the group included very diverse stakeholders who had little understanding of one another’s perspectives. Though most of the scientific information they ended up using was already in existence, it took the group nearly four years to agree on which data to trust and on how to organize and present it in their status and trends reports on the estuary.

Though it was essential to have enough time, too much time meant that discussion could go on forever, with no closure. The self-organizing processes we examined dealt with the time problem by establishing limited-term goals and targeting their products to meet the schedules of other bodies. For example, in Contra Costa the filing deadlines for the November 1988 election provided a clear target date for results. As the deadline approached players became more willing to make compromises. The Natural Communities Conservation Planning process was guided by a sense of urgency to develop a habitat conservation plan as an alternative to the pending petitions to have the gnatcatcher listed as endangered. The Growth Management Consensus Project was pressed by the possibility that the legislature or the governor would support growth management legislation at the start of the next session, and the players wanted it to reflect their concerns. Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition members, all of whom sought legislation, feared the loss of what they saw as a window of opportunity. These deadlines allowed progress, though they did not produce full consensus.

The San Francisco Estuary Project, on the other hand, was given a five-year absolute deadline by the federal government, without interim deadlines. This worked in two counterproductive ways. First, at the outset, the deadline was so far in the future that it provided little incentive for reaching closure in the early years. As the deadline approached, however, it became necessary to hire facilitators who would push hard toward closure, cutting off in-depth discussion of issues that simply arose again after the process was over.

### **Regional Differences**

The metropolitan areas of the state differ in the degree to which players have a sense of being part of a common region. In San Diego, virtually everyone we spoke with commented on the widely shared sense of regional identity. The geography of the county contributes to this sense since the county's borders are well defined and its population is concentrated within a few miles of the coast. The region is a single county and many of the municipalities are only recently incorporated. For the most part, there are neither long histories of battles among cities nor the long-term emotional commitments to a municipality that are more common in other regions. Finally, whatever differences they do have, municipalities in San Diego County are joined by pride in their differences from their neighbors to the north, in the Los Angeles area, and by a shared conviction that they want to maintain this distinctiveness.

The story is different in the San Francisco Bay Area, where there is considerably less consensus on a regional identity or on the concept of regional cooperation. The Bay Area is a nine-county region with three major cities and, as the Contra Costa case shows, there are deep cleavages even within a single county. In that county, the term "region" is used to describe a section within the county, and when the consensus-building process started, there was barely a "regional" sense within each of these. Nonetheless, the visual image of the San Francisco Bay contributes to a shared sense of place, and many significant players do regard themselves and their jurisdictions as belonging to a region. A strong environmental movement that aims for urban limit lines and compact growth patterns contributes, on the one hand, to a rhetoric of regionalism and on the other to the fears of some outlying areas that they will be overwhelmed by the other players and unable to protect their own interests in a regional body. Thus in the Bay Area there are both strong proponents of regionalism and strong resistance.

In the sprawling Los Angeles area, many key players do not regard themselves as belonging to a common region. The sheer population size (15 million), diversity, and distances make it uniquely difficult to link the region together visually, experientially, or administratively. The area is made up of six vast counties, each of which has its own centers, though all six have grown into a seamless pattern of development. Travel to a single meeting place is problematic, and knowledge of other parts of the region is inevitably limited for any individual. For these reasons, we expect that regional coordination through consensus building will be most difficult to achieve in the Los Angeles area.

Not surprisingly, the metropolitan areas have very different histories of regional cooperation and willingness to rely on their councils of government. San Diego is characterized by a two-decade-long history of intergovernmental cooperation within the county and a highly successful council of governments, which has engaged in a wide variety of planning and



regional administrative activities since the 1970s. Through participation in SANDAG local officials have gotten to know one another and have learned to work together. Although, even in San Diego most players oppose creating a regional government, many acknowledge that SANDAG has de facto become a sort of regional government, and they are quite comfortable with SANDAG in that role. This comfort made it possible for the blue ribbon committee set up by Measure C to designate SANDAG as the agency in charge of formulating the regional growth management strategy, thereby avoiding creating yet another layer of government.

In contrast, in the Bay Area, Bay Vision 2020 met substantial opposition from local governments to its proposal to merge three regional agencies, including ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments), the regional COG, because of their fear of consolidated regional power. Players in the Los Angeles area are debating whether to maintain a single COG at all — SCAG (Southern California Association of Governments) — or to split it into multiple COGs. One well-informed City of Los Angeles player reported, “No one trusts SCAG as representing the city. However we will let them try subregional planning.” A number of the other people we spoke with in the region also spoke of not trusting SCAG, ironically because *they* said it was dominated by the City of Los Angeles. Yet SCAG is the only multipurpose regional agency that covers the area.

Nor are local governments trustful enough of county government in the Bay Area or Los Angeles area for counties to provide the locale for a more regional scale of planning. Contra Costa officials felt compelled to create a new countywide organization to administer its Measure C because of local mistrust of county government. Many attribute at least part of this mistrust to recent statewide budget cuts that have resulted in what one county stakeholder termed a “war” and “cannibalism” between cities and counties, as each seeks ways to finance their activities at the other's expense. Thus, state-level decisions on how to make cuts have exacerbated conflicts between cities and counties.

Each of the three major metropolitan areas also has a different distribution of powers and responsibilities among its regional agencies. SANDAG has both Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Congestion Management Agency responsibilities among its many roles. In the Bay Area ABAG is not the MPO, but rather the Metropolitan Transportation Agency, and counties have their own congestion management agencies. In Los Angeles, although SCAG is the MPO for the region, the powerful Metropolitan Transportation Agency is expected to receive \$180 billion for the next 30 years to do transportation planning and projects. A growing planning effort in Orange County challenges SCAG's role as well.

In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program the state was sensitive to the desire of local governments to determine their own planning areas. Consequently, local governments were allowed to establish their own multijurisdictional planning areas called “subregions,” as long as the state and federal resource agencies agreed that the boundaries chosen were ecologically defensible.

### **Formal Products of the Consensus Processes**

The formal products of consensus-building processes were of several kinds, such as consensually agreed-upon plans, guidelines, legislation, performance standards, technical

descriptions of a situation, and sometimes simply lists of agreements. In San Diego the primary product was a Regional Growth Management Strategy; in the estuary projects it was a Conservation and Management Plan, along with a scientific characterization of the estuary or bay, as well as recommended indicators for measuring water quality. In the Growth Management Consensus Project it was a list of largely agreed-upon principles, and in the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition it was draft legislation. The Natural Communities Conservation Planning program has thus far produced a set of biological survey guidelines for conservation planning, process guidelines for creating subregional plans and conservation strategies, and conservation biology standards to be used in these plans. The Coachella process involved creating and implementing the details of a habitat conservation strategy and designating and acquiring specific areas for protection. One of the base closure processes produced an agreed-upon strategy. In Bay Vision 2020, the product was a report proposing some basic features of a recommended regional governance system. In Contra Costa the product was a set of ballot measures that passed.

The first product of these consensus processes was often largely descriptive rather than prescriptive. It was apt to be quite general, focusing attention on certain issues and pointing to desirable policy directions, rather than specifying precise actions or allocating costs and benefits. It was not, in most cases, a document reflecting the resolution of major conflict. In San Diego, the Regional Growth Management Strategy was basically a compilation of existing federal and state mandates. In the San Francisco Estuary Project the first product was a set of status and trends reports characterizing the estuary. The plan itself was largely about tasks that were going to be done in any case, at least in the view of many participants. In the Growth Management Consensus Project the first product was a list of “emerging agreements” which really consisted of a set of principles on which players agreed — such as, there should be some type of land designation system, or there should be certainty for all players. These agreements said nothing about how to implement them nor how to set priorities among them, but they did represent a narrowing and focusing of the issues.

Even these largely descriptive products and general principles played an important role in improving coordination, however, and set up the conditions for continuing cooperation. In San Diego, the very act of compiling mandates in such previously separate areas as transportation, air quality, water quality, and solid waste served to focus players’ attention on the interrelationships among these issue areas and to get all localities within the county thinking in similar ways. In the SFEP, the description of the estuary in terms of its salinity levels marked a movement away from the traditional ways that many agencies or interests looked at the problem of water quality. It was no longer mainly a question of measuring pollution “at the end of the pipe.” Moreover, by implication, the actors (dischargers, regulatory agencies, environmentalists, and developers, among others) were acknowledging that the problems of the estuary were collective rather than discrete problems caused by individual polluters.

In some cases, significant agreements were achieved in the consensus process that changed the conditions for future action. The near-consensus on the use of the salinity measure in the San Francisco Estuary Project meant that the federal government could use it as its official water quality measure, and thus challenge California’s politically powerful water

interests. The focus on water quality indicators related to human health in the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project represented a new direction for water quality management in the bay. In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program the development of a sophisticated concept of protecting whole natural communities within interconnected landscapes was an important new contribution toward resolving the conflict over endangered species. It was creative because it gave opportunities to developers, greater certainty to environmental advocates, and guidelines to local land use planning. Most important, it created better coordinated and more proactive conservation planning by local, state, and federal agencies, instead of waiting to react once a single species is on the brink of extinction. In Contra Costa, the agreement to link transportation improvements to some form of growth management marked a significant breakthrough.

In the Growth Management Consensus Project and later Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, the agreement to include social equity issues in the growth management strategy represented substantial learning among participants and redirection of their proposals. As one of the leaders of the equity stakeholders in GMCP noted,

The parties wanted to pigeonhole social equity as an issue at first. They wanted to label certain questions as appropriately considered only when social equity was on the table or to associate it with issues like civil rights, or other specifics. Social equity is not a particular thing, or an interest. It is a value which has to be considered throughout the discussion. It took about a year for them to get this straight.

These first-step products were also valuable for their role in paving the way for other, more difficult to achieve, agreements. The ability to demonstrate success created trust and commitment to the process. The products themselves marked the creation of intellectual capital and provided a record of this shared knowledge. With these products some groups were ready to move on to more complex tasks. For example, SANDAG committees have been working on recommendations for new financing mechanisms for regional infrastructure, on issues of open space acquisition, and on a regional economic strategy, all of which will eventually be incorporated in the RGMS. Addressing these “home grown” issues marks a major step beyond just responding to the federal and state mandates included in the original strategy.

A crucial and, in most cases, unanswered question is whether such formal products as plans or guidelines will be implemented, and whether legislation will pass. Indeed, some players and observers assume that the test of consensus building lies in implementation of policies and plans. As one of the key players in the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project explained, “Success will depend on the ways to implement the plan. It depends on agencies accepting responsibility and on funding. It is not clear it will happen.” Only one of the cases we studied (Coachella Valley) is far enough along to permit an assessment of how effectively agreements will be turned into actions, and in this case the results are mixed. Responsible agencies, however, do not necessarily have to be coerced to act if they have actually bought into a plan. One agency head told us, “I want to use the plan as a *basis* for implementing actions, but not as a club.” In San Diego a number of local officials said they anticipated the

Regional Growth Management Strategy would be implemented in great part through peer pressure as neighboring communities looked over each other's shoulders. In some cases, the mere fact that consensus has been achieved on a plan may leave others without the politically viable choice of ignoring it. One skeptic in the San Francisco Estuary Project said, "If that sort of thing [consensus processes] gets the governor to sign the plan, then it may have been good."

### **Participants' Assessment of Consensus Building**

Those we interviewed were almost all supportive of consensus building as a method. A typical comment was, "This way of getting people together to work things out is the wave of the future." Though players differed in their enthusiasm for the particular process they were involved in, we found no dissent from the idea that, in principle, consensus building was the way to deal with the issue they faced.<sup>21</sup>

The more sophisticated observers also understood that consensus building was useful for coordination. As the chair of the San Francisco Estuary Project said, "I can say we have gotten better coordination through consensus process, though we did not necessarily have consensus on everything." One facilitator explained how it works: "Somewhere along the line people realize you cannot have it all. People may grumble, but at this point it often seems just common sense. Consensus building does not solve everything, but it does solve a lot." A San Francisco participant used a systems metaphor to capture the subtle changes that resulted from consensus building:

Things are so rapidly changing that we can't say what is. We cannot see some things past our belief system. It looks like disorder, but I can now see a different kind of order, order in process and change, instead of certainty and hardness. The difference after consensus building is that before, things were stable in a bad situation, while now they are flowing in the right direction. Now the no action solution is no longer acceptable.

Participants also sounded notes of caution and criticism, reminding us of the inherent limitations of consensus building. As one pointed out,

It can be done at the wrong point. It has to be when everyone knows there is a problem. It also depends on who is at the table and if the issue is small enough. It can work quite well but things have to be at the boiling point.

Another, commenting on the San Francisco Estuary plan, noted,

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<sup>21</sup> Presumably, dissenters from this approach did not participate in the first place, although many of those we interviewed were skeptics at the outset, and even the ones who did not get much of what they wanted from the process still felt it was the way to do things.

There is a danger that we have created something so unrealistic that it will fail. The process moved forward by the lowest common denominator. It's good enough, let's go forward. A great piece of sausage was developed.

One critic of the GMCP thought:

The consensus process is useful for finding where land mines are, but on something as broad as this, just short of a constitutional convention, it is not right to bring special interests together to do the job.

### **Summary of Findings**

- Consensus building did not happen spontaneously. All the cases had either a legislative mandate or committed leadership to start them off, along with incentives for key players to seek agreement.
- Groups were self-organizing, whether the consensus process was mandated by law or was an ad hoc effort. The groups chose stakeholders; structured subcommittees; set ground rules; framed the problem; and decided on tasks, procedures, and products.
- Most groups tried to include all interested stakeholders to assure that the agreements could be implemented.
- Stakeholders came to the table and tried to reach agreement when the status quo had become unsatisfactory and they became convinced they could not accomplish their goals in other arenas, or when they became convinced they would have to participate to protect their interests.
- Participation and willingness to compromise were affected by members' perceptions of the likelihood that agreements would be implemented.
- When parallel arenas were available for resolving the issues, the potential for agreement diminished.
- Staff played crucial roles in each case, facilitating and managing the whole process, and providing technical information.
- Consensus building takes substantial time — at least one year and as many as five in some of our cases — to reach agreement on a complex plan.
- Consensus-building processes generally involved multiple committees, that formed and reformed in response to issues that emerged.
- Although the processes were highly conflictual at times, participants stayed involved, for the most part. They expressed support for the consensus approach to the issues and claimed to have learned a great deal.

- Local government representatives had a difficult time participating effectively, except where they were the principal players, as in San Diego. The reasons include limited staff capacity, the diversity of the local interests they represented, and the differences between elected officials and other players at the table.
- There are tremendous differences across the state's three largest metropolitan regions in attitudes toward regionalism and in the experience of agencies and jurisdictions in cooperating at the regional level.
- In almost every case, agreements were reached on legislation, plans, policies, performance and monitoring standards, or principles and guidelines for public agency action.
- It remains too early to judge the outcomes of the processes in terms of actions carried out as a direct result of formal agreements and plans, except in the Coachella Valley, where a number of actions have resulted.
- New consensus groups have been created in some cases to work out the implementation approaches. These continuing efforts are among the products of consensus building.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In our view, a focus on formal products and their direct consequences is a short-sighted way to assess consensus-building processes. If we evaluate these cases solely by such things as plans agreed on and implemented or legislation passed, most of them would be counted as failures or, at most, limited successes. Though most have produced plans or policy statements, sometimes these do not represent major changes, and often conflicts remain. In addition, implementation prospects may be unclear, as the plans lack teeth or funding.

All the processes we examined, however, contributed to coordination and altered the actions and attitudes of both participants and the organizations they represent. These results can be seen as contributing to long-term changes in the ways of doing the public's business — changes that move in the direction of greater communication and collaboration among players and greater agreement on the facts and actions. These changes have contributed to a reduction in the paralyzing conflict that has characterized the growth arena in recent years. They have helped to institutionalize norms of interaction among players that are less adversarial and litigious and more collaborative and aimed toward gradual mutual accommodation.

### **The Creation of Social, Intellectual, and Political Capital**

We contend that consensus building achieves its coordination effects in great part by creating or amplifying three types of capital: social, intellectual, and political. In successful group processes, an essential element is the creation of capital beyond that which individual participants initially bring with them. We use the term capital because it represents shared value that can grow as it is used. Once created, this capital lives on among participants even after the group disbands, and it facilitates future coordination. Social capital, in the form of trust, norms of behavior, and networks of communication, creates the potential for serious discussion to take place among otherwise conflicting stakeholders.<sup>22</sup> Intellectual capital, in the form of shared and agreed-upon facts and understandings, provides a common basis for discussion and moves the players toward agreement on policy issues. Political capital, in the form of alliances and agreements on proposals that provide mutual gain, creates the possibility that proposals will be adopted and implemented in the political arena.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Coleman (1990).

<sup>23</sup> Gruber, *Coordinating Growth Management through Consensus-Building: Incentives and the Generation of Social, Intellectual, and Political Capital*, University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, Working Paper 617 (1994).

The processes through which social, intellectual, and political capital are created reinforce one another. As participants learn to communicate and trust one another — i.e., as they amass social capital — they are more likely to be able to agree on a common indicator of a problem. As participants come to understand one another's policy needs, they are more likely to overcome previous mutual distrust, even if they still don't agree. And, as social and intellectual capital are amassed, a group is in a better position to deal with the outside world and create the political capital necessary to turn agreements into action. Where one or another type of capital was missing, or where the group did not give attention to creating this capital, there were real limitations on its effectiveness. The production of capital became a benefit produced by the group and the ability to share in it an incentive to keep people at the table.

### **Social Capital: Coordination Through Personal Relationships and the Building of Community**

The most striking finding of this study, because we observed it in every case, was that virtually all participants valued the consensus-building process in principle, and most found it provided both personal benefits and relationships that furthered their organization's goals. For example, a representative of one of the least-satisfied stakeholders in the Growth Management Consensus Project told us, "I thought the process was very positive. I met a lot of people and now I know where they are coming from." In the Coachella Valley case, a county planner noted that, "Career-wise, it was the best thing I have done." Another from the process, who was unhappy with the results, nonetheless said of his own participation, "It was absolutely worthwhile. It is always good to get people talking. You get to size people up and it is always good to know people individually." But the overall result was also to further the organization's objectives. As another San Francisco Estuary Project member said, "Good will is an important ingredient in all this. The estuary project is a good example of how good will was developed over time."

The first step in consensus building was for participants to build social capital. They learned how to talk and listen to others with whom they had adversarial relationships and little or no communication in the past. They met over meals and in other informal contexts. In the process, they learned that their adversaries were real people, rather than cardboard stereotypes. They learned that their basic interests were not necessarily fundamentally at odds, despite opposing positions they had staked out beforehand. They learned that there were substantial areas and issues on which they could agree. For many participants these were revelations.

Many players came to develop some trust of former adversaries, even teaming up with them — as did environmental and development interests in the Natural Communities Conservation Planning program, the Coachella Valley, and the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition. Even though trust was not invariably created, lines of communication and a degree of understanding were routinely established. Where there were already working relationships, consensus building strengthened and expanded them to more players. Participants were increasingly able to discuss issues constructively inside the meetings as well as outside. One developer in the NCCP, who disagreed strongly with one of the environmentalists, concluded that over time this environmental advocate had come to genuinely want to



find solutions. One player in Growth Management Consensus Project explained how they built trust: “We yelled at each other for hours and then went out to lunch. This brought issues to a human level.”

These individual relationships turned into personal networks that participants used outside of the meetings for many coordination tasks.<sup>24</sup> As one federal agency participant in SFEP stated,

One major result of the process is I now have networks into 40 different groups representing different values and points of view. If they have frustrations they can call me. I get called a lot. I call them a lot too. I am on the phone with the Sierra Club almost every day. I try to find out what they are doing and to see what I can do to help that is consistent with (our agency’s) objectives.

Commenting on the effect of the process on others, he added, “The networks cross organizations and disciplines, scientists, managers and politicians.”

The net effect of these relationships over time was to build community. Social capital is the principal ingredient of a shared sense of community. Moreover, social capital allows the participants to respond flexibly and appropriately to complex issues and mandates. The comment of one experienced consensus builder, who was part of the Growth Management Consensus Project, expresses this view:

The process of doing it [consensus building] was important. Process is ephemeral, getting together and breaking apart, but it parallels the flexible linkages of industry they talk about today which strengthen industrial organization, and make it adaptable to change and innovative. This kind of process may be a beginning of having democratic institutions work in similar ways. You build a kind of glue. You build communities of trust and interest.

### **Intellectual Capital: Coordination Through Shared Knowledge**

In all cases, the consensus-building group built a shared base of knowledge, though the type and amount of such knowledge differed widely across cases. At a minimum, the group learned about the perspectives, problems, and understandings of members and the interests they represented. In the Growth Management Consensus Project, for example, environmentalists and developers learned that most growth policies had equity implications for ethnic minorities and the poor. Environmentalists and developers each learned that certainty was important to the other. In Coachella Valley they learned that both groups disliked the piecemeal project-by-project approach to conservation planning and both preferred long-term comprehensive planning to protect the species, though for different reasons. Participants in all

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<sup>24</sup> Chisholm (1989) describes the importance of personal networks as a way of coordinating in the case of the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) system and regional transportation planning.

cases learned about the problem, found out where they had common ground, and identified the “deal breaker” issues for the others.

This shared understanding included knowledge of how each participant’s actions affected the others. In some cases participants went a step further and came to recognize they were all part of an interdependent system, and they learned something about how that system worked. In the San Francisco Estuary Project, players learned how water quality was a result of a complex combination of effects of discharges, runoff, dredging, water flows, and construction on wetlands, and that there was no simple relationship between a single activity and environmental outcomes. In the Contra Costa case, participants learned about the needs of different regions of the county and how the different parts of the county were linked by travel patterns. Before the process started, the very concept of a transportation corridor was foreign to most participants. In Coachella Valley, developers and local government representatives learned about the complex processes of the dune ecosystem, while environmentalists learned about land acquisition and development. They collectively learned how these two processes had to be joined to protect the habitat.

A major part of the shared understanding was, in most cases, an agreed-upon set of issues or a shared view of the nature of the problem. The Growth Management Consensus Project quickly developed a list of the issues that needed resolving. In Contra Costa County new understandings of problems were created in early brainstorming sessions, which led to a shared view that transportation and growth management issues had to be linked for either to be addressed effectively. Discussions also led to a new understanding of the structure of transportation finance, as key players convinced others that a county tax source was necessary to produce matching funds needed to obtain state and federal transportation money.

Participants in San Diego used technical information to convince themselves that a problem existed and had to be addressed. Staff used population projections to demonstrate persuasively to planning directors and city managers that population growth through the early part of the next century could not be accommodated within existing general plans, and that therefore a new plan had to be created. The economic strategy committee had to develop a common understanding of the nature of the economy in statistical terms before it could begin its work. Similarly, the first task of the regional infrastructure committee was to survey the extent of the county’s infrastructure needs. Though members all knew there were needs, that knowledge was neither salient nor specific. The data the committee collected made it both.

Some groups built scientific descriptions of problems or designed measures for monitoring and control. Sometimes these tasks were accomplished through consensus building among scientists alone; sometimes they included nonscientists. Participants questioned and challenged scientific findings, defined concepts, and agreed on statements of fact and ways to define technical problems. In some important sense they constructed the facts through a social process. When they did so successfully and achieved agreement, the intellectual capital that resulted was an important coordinating tool.

In several cases one of the group’s tasks was to build an agreed-on data base. This is similar to the process referred to as joint fact finding in consensus-building literature. Typically it involved assessing, interpreting, and selecting among existing data those that were most reliable and relevant to the issues. The estuary projects provide the best example because

they were required to develop a scientific characterization of the estuary. A major achievement in both was that players moved away from adversarial science, which had been encouraged by the use of litigation as a conflict resolution strategy, to consensual science.<sup>25</sup> In adversarial science, no one believes anyone else's data and, as one of the leaders among the technical players explained,

there is no question of peer review. Moreover, differing opinions are equally weighted. So, if 99 percent of the scientific opinion supports one view and only a few people support another, they are weighed equally.

In contrast, in the San Francisco Estuary Project the validation of data was done in a group that included many experts searching for consensual criteria for accepting research findings as accurate. In this process the participants also selected the facts they determined were relevant. Agreement on these facts marked an important step in coordination.

This effort to develop information sometimes translated into agreement on plans or policies. In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning case, the work of the consensually accepted scientific review panel formed the basis for several key aspects of the program. This was particularly remarkable, as species protection is an area in which there is normally acrimonious debate and mistrust among technical staff working for different players. The work of the panel convinced the other participants that 5 percent of the coastal sage scrub habitat in the planning area could be developed before the long-term plans were in place without compromising the viability of the natural community. In the Coachella Valley case, studies of sand transportation convinced developers that the final reserve had to protect not only the sand dunes where the endangered species lived, but also the dunes' sand source, which was some distance away. The studies also indicated that the dunes could be perpetuated even if all sand sources were not protected. As a result, the environmentalists changed their position and agreed that some sand sources could be left out of the reserve.

In other cases, agreement on data helped to frame problems and point groups in particular policy directions. In San Diego, the data the economic strategy committee put together showed not only economic decline, but an economy based heavily on tourism. This definition of a key part of the problem became a focal point for discussion of solutions. Once the committee came to accept this idea as fact, it structured members' thinking about the economy and brought them to a common starting place for working through solutions. SANDAG's data on population growth framed the growth problem, because they showed that most growth was occurring from natural increase and not primarily from immigration, as many had assumed.

For the regional infrastructure committee in San Diego, technical information helped to create criteria for evaluating alternative policy directions. The issue was how to fund new regional infrastructure. A split developed on the committee between those who wanted to fund regional infrastructure exclusively from impact fees levied on new development, and those who wanted to include other revenue sources. In the end, the debate was resolved after participants looked at the data showing that current infrastructure deficits were not solely due

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<sup>25</sup> See Ozawa (1991).

to new development. Only then could they agree that impact fees could not be the sole source of funding.

In Contra Costa County, an important piece of intellectual capital was an agreed-upon description of the political landscape. One key set of stakeholders, a group of developers, commissioned a series of opinion polls exploring, among other things, support for a variety of specific transportation improvements. The polls became a key reference point for the group as a whole when considering the impact of including various proposals in the ballot measure they were preparing. Since everyone accepted the polls as valid, they served as a reality check against which participants could evaluate proposals and resolve controversies.

Technical information did at times resolve disputes, but only when both technical and nontechnical players agreed to the accuracy and appropriateness of the data. This agreement was not easy to achieve. In the SFEP, the co-chairs of the technical advisory committee put substantial effort into bridge building between these two sets of players. One of them said:

Most technical people are not willing to work with policy makers and try to understand what they want. Managers don't ask the right question and technicians don't study the right thing. The communication problem is both ways. We put together a workshop of technical and managers. We accomplished getting them to talk and trust each other. Managers kept saying, "tell us how bad the bay is." They want to know how much it costs to clean it up and who would do it, but the technicians are concerned with the scientific descriptions.

Technicians reluctantly agreed to managers' insistence that the data in the status and trends reports should be published only in combination with management options.

In both estuary cases, indicators designed as a result of the group's discussions became consensual criteria for assessing water quality. These indicators may turn out to be the most significant products of the process in terms of policy impact. In the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project, agreement on monitoring certain bacteria counts represented an agreement that dangers to humans in their use of the bay were a central priority. In the San Francisco Estuary Project, the scientists' workshops and ensuing discussions in the management committee led to near-consensus on the 2 parts per thousand isohaline measure (a measure of water salinity associated with the generation of biodiversity) for assessing the health of the estuary. This agreement reflected a priority for promoting biodiversity in the estuary and a change from an earlier policy focusing on end-of-the-pipe pollutants and the prevalence of individual endangered species. As a system outcome measure rather than a measure of an individual factor, the choice of a salinity measure reflected an emerging understanding that all the players' activities are part of a common system, the health of which is important to all. Most significantly, the use of this measure has already challenged the strongly held position of the powerful state water agency, because this kind of measure intrinsically associates water quality with water flows, which that agency had tried to keep off the table. Although the appropriate location of this salinity level within the estuary for optimal biodiversity was a more controversial question, at the present writing federal agencies are proposing to use the

location defined by the group as the standard for assessing Bay-Delta water quality in their regulatory processes.

### **Political Capital: Amassing the Power to Act**

These processes to varying degrees also produced political capital — that is, they created alliances among players, giving them individually and collectively more political power than in the past. Where agreements were meaningful and players had truly adopted the ideas and policies in a consensual way, seeing them as providing joint gain, these agreements carried political power behind them. The comment of one participant could be echoed for the other cases: “The consensus aspects generated a lot of support for the San Francisco Estuary Project.”

Participants in the Contra Costa County case were acutely aware of their need to build political capital, since their whole effort was a response to the failure of an earlier ballot measure. Leaders of the first ballot campaign quickly turned to a political consultant who urged including the major opponents of the first measure in the consensus-building process. This decision meant that the final measure contained projects in all parts of the county, return-to-source funds that would benefit cities, and parkland bonds to satisfy the environmentalists. The agreement among these players not only provided the political capital to pass the measure, it also established new alliances that were to continue in the next phase. Political capital was also an important product of the Growth Management Consensus Project and its successor, the Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, as each resulted in political alliances among business and environmental interests, along with a variety of others. Though the political capital developed was not necessarily enough to implement a project or legislation, it was often enough to change the political landscape for the future. In the Natural Communities Conservation Planning and Coachella Valley cases, the participants were well aware of how powerful their alliance was. In the latter, participants remarked on how impressed congressional staff were when environmentalists, developers, and local officials came to Washington to lobby jointly for their plan. Furthermore, because the state Resources Agency had made NCCP a high-profile effort, most participants in that project believed that the state had committed itself to producing a final product.

Missing political capital appears to have been a limiting factor on the achievements of several cases. In the GMCP/EERC the failure to get agreement and support from a substantial proportion of local governments, from substantial segments of the business community, and from the governor has been a principal obstacle to passage of legislation. The political capital amassed by the EERC may be enough if a governor more predisposed to support growth management is elected. In Bay Vision, intellectual capital was created as the group spent much of its time learning about the issues, but little political capital, because the membership did not include the stakeholders and activists who would carry the legislation. In general, the creation of shared political capital is associated with having the significant stakeholders at the table.

Certain stakeholders may be necessary to generate adequate political capital for implementation. In the San Francisco Estuary Project, for example, one participant contended that because the process did not include stakeholders outside the estuary, the results lacked statewide support:

The management committee is not balanced. It has a regional bias towards the Bay and Delta. It does not consider overall statewide water issues, which is important, because once water diversion is on the table, it becomes a statewide issue. The state water contractors' association, the state water project users, are major diverters from the estuary, and they were not allowed to participate. This meant a lost opportunity to bring in support for the process from the farmers, water users.

While this political support would have been valuable, the estuary project was unlikely to have attained it if the other stakeholders had been involved, because a parallel consensus process that included these water users (the Tripartite process) was unable to resolve the issues. The inclusion of these stakeholders might have hampered the building of political capital among the other players. It remains to be seen whether the estuary process has altered the distribution of political capital sufficiently to change the outcomes for the San Francisco Bay.

### **The Consequences of Consensus Building: A Summary**

Consensus-building processes coordinated players' actions, reduced conflict, and provided the opportunity for effectively managing growth. Consensus building helped in a wide range of ways to get the many actors in the growth process functioning as part of a common system. Much of this coordination can be described as the building of shared social, intellectual, and political capital among the stakeholders. We anticipate that this capital will remain and that it will grow as it is used in the future. Thus we believe the results of these processes will continue to be felt in the long term, because they have already influenced practices and institutionalized norms of interaction.

To summarize, consensus-building processes had the following results:

- Plans, strategies, legislative proposals, and ballot measures were produced that were supported by many, if not most, important stakeholders. Each of these in itself is a coordination tool.
- Consensus was reached on information describing the issues, on indicators for monitoring and assessment, or on scientific principles for environmental management. Stakeholders began to operate with the same information and criteria.
- Stakeholders, formerly in conflict, developed lines of communication and some degree of mutual understanding, trust, and capacity to work together constructively. They learned how their actions affected one another. They developed less stereotyped and less adversarial views of one another.
- New personal networks were created among stakeholders, which help their organizations coordinate their actions. These have become flexible linkages across agencies, levels of government, and the public and private sector, which allow for rapid and appropriate response to issues.

- Stakeholders affected by the issues, but not previously involved in public discussions, were brought into consensus-building processes and learned how the proposals would affect them. Coordination was thus extended to more players, and actions were based on a broader set of perspectives.
- Stakeholders gained new and largely shared understandings of the problems, their causes, and consequences.
- Stakeholders' organizations changed their actions, positions, and policies, moving closer to others' views, as a result of what their representatives learned during consensus building.
- Some processes resulted in a shared understanding of how all members play a part in a common economic, transportation, or ecological system.
- Participation has changed the practices of the members, many of whom have begun to use consensus building in their other work. The result is to reduce conflict and help to build a culture of collaboration among these agencies and interests.

These effects each occurred in some, but not all, cases. Many conditions in the institutional context were important to the success of an effort, as was the design and management of the process itself.

### **The Institutional Context for Consensus Building**

The frameworks within which consensus building took place had several features in common. In each case a set of basic conditions brought stakeholders together to seek agreement. The combination of conditions was important, as each worked in conjunction with the others. The first was that key players saw the status quo, or the most likely future, as unacceptable. In some cases a threatened change in the status quo was what triggered the group's formation. Secondly, no one stakeholder or agency, or even small group of stakeholders, had the sole power to control the outcomes. Many stakeholders had some power, if only to stop action. Third, the stakeholders had some reason to believe that if they did reach agreement, their conclusions were likely to have a significant impact on public action — that decision-makers would pay attention. And fourth, for individual stakeholders to be willing to come to the table they had to believe they would have sufficient influence at the table to make their participation worthwhile, and that this was the best arena in which to accomplish their purposes.

The consensus-building efforts we examined were self-organized, adaptive, and operated with considerable independence and autonomy. Committees formed and worked for a time and sometimes ended their work, only to be followed up by other committees, picking up where they left off. Ad hoc and long-term committees were created as participants perceived the need for them. Individuals and interests were grouped and regrouped. New stakeholders were added as the group identified missing interests or knowledge in the course of its work. Consensus groups largely determined the structure and details of their own tasks, even in cases like the

estuary projects, that required broadly defined products like characterization of the estuary and conservation and management plans. Groups made their own decisions about whether to develop strategies, plans, policies, legislation, technical data, performance standards, or other products.

The institutional context provided incentives for collective action and a framework that enabled flexibility and self-management. Although something in the political, legislative, or economic environment created the incentives for consensus building and offered potential rewards for success in reaching agreements, no authority dictated precisely what should be done or how. This freedom and autonomy were often cited as a key to engaging the stakeholders over time and giving them the sense of ownership over the process that was essential to their willingness to try to reach agreement. Nonetheless, this freedom was bounded to some degree by participants' own knowledge of what was practical to do and by messages, formal or informal, from decision-makers and responsible public agencies about what kinds of tasks and agreements could make a difference.



## **CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

Consensus building is a crucial strategy for successfully managing growth, and should be given a central place in state planning. Although it is time consuming, we believe that it will save resources overall by reducing conflict and encouraging many types of invisible forms of coordination and mutual adjustment in the shared power context in which growth occurs.

### **A Framework for Consensus Building**

As we have demonstrated, consensus building does not happen spontaneously. All of the cases we examined had special features making the issues ripe for consensus building. They all had either a legislative mandate or committed leadership to start them off. The environment in which they operated provided the conditions to encourage and enable them. Their success also depended on the design and management of the processes themselves. To make consensus building an integral part of growth management the state will have to create the institutional context and incentive structure to enable the building of social, intellectual, and political capital among the important participants in regional growth.

The state can create the framework necessary for successful consensus building. First, it can alter the status quo, which now involves local governments and state agencies making growth-related decisions independently of one another. By requiring that state agencies coordinate growth-related decisions with regions it can change the rules of the game for this decision-making. It can require the creation of a regional plan or strategy, if not by local and regional players, then by the state. Such threats to the status quo change the incentive structure facing potential participants by presenting risks to those who do not participate.

Second, the state can legislate to reduce the power of any agency with an overwhelmingly strong mandate that provides little incentive for cooperation. Air quality districts or heavily funded agencies such as the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority are candidates for such action. At the same time, by providing staff or technical support to such players as community-based organizations or poorly funded local governments the state can increase the participation of other stakeholders whose voice is needed to get fair or effective growth management, or who might otherwise stay outside the process and sabotage it.

Third, the state can assure the participants in growth management that agreements they reach will carry weight, or that their agreements will be implemented and plans carried out.

Finally, the state can reduce the alternative arenas simultaneously available to resolve growth-related issues by creating forums and arenas specifically designed for these debates to occur and requiring local governments, state agencies, and others to resolve issues and differences in these arenas before initiating lawsuits or independent decisions.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of creating these new institutional arrangements for managing growth will be to create a new set of norms and expectations, not only in Sacramento but across the state. These new practices would not involve top-down regulation

or bureaucratic control. Instead, many different forms of action and strategy would develop in different parts of the state, though framed by some common constraints. The idea of creating a framework for flexibility means that policymakers have to tolerate considerable variation in the implementation process. On the basis of this research, however, we believe that the benefits of relying on self-managed, adaptive processes are significant and may indeed be essential to the effectiveness of growth management.

### **Implementation of Plans and Policies**

Implementation is likely to be at least as contentious as policymaking, and thus consensus building is likely to be necessary after plans and policies are adopted. The evidence in our cases is that formal mechanisms to enforce agreed-upon plans, policies, and other documents might well be insufficient to assure implementation. As several of our cases have shown, agreements in principle break down when specific and potentially binding language must be accepted. In some cases, difficult issues were deliberately postponed in the interests of achieving agreement on initial phases of a plan. In Contra Costa, for example, discussion of the order in which projects would be done over the 20-year life of the measure was not included in the original proposal to the voters, and this has proved to be a highly conflictual issue. In the San Francisco Estuary Project, even setting up the plan implementation committee was a highly contentious process. As implementation depends in considerable part on the depth and quality of agreements, consensus building should be regarded as a continuing exercise needed over time.

### **The Local Government Role**

Local governments must be willing and active players in both designing and implementing growth management systems. Their knowledge of how regulation and public investment play out in local communities, and their unique control over land use, make it essential that they come to the table and stay until agreements are reached. The agreements must be real and lasting because it is local governments that must implement much of growth management. A local government representative to the Growth Management Consensus Project provided this perspective:

Any successful growth management strategy has local government as a key player. They can make a program not work if they have not bought in. They are the ones who know how to do it. They are the only group that can make a bridge among the players and activities.

The experience of other states supports this view. In Florida, for example, where a top-down approach to growth management incorporated heavy financial penalties to localities with plans that were inconsistent with state policy, 50 percent of all plans submitted in the first round were judged inconsistent. Despite the state's strong enforcement powers, years of

discussion and negotiation were required to get local plans into forms acceptable to the state. Moreover, state guidelines were challenged in lengthy administrative hearings and ultimately had to be changed because they were not adapted to the variety of local conditions. In Maine, where a state bureaucracy was also charged with reviewing local plans for compliance with state requirements, agency staff admitted they could do little more than mechanically check for inclusion of appropriate elements, statements, and information. They had no way to check local plans for their substantive coherence with state policies and purposes.

In California, the difficulty of trying to impose a solution on local government is aggravated by the fiscal crisis. Even if the legislature could pass a growth management program without the widespread support of local governments, the long series of cutbacks in local funding and revenue sources has made the sanction of cutting funding for local noncompliance an idle threat in the view of many local players. The revenue potential from sprawling shopping malls and single-use office developments is often more compelling than the financial penalties or incentives for cooperation that the state may offer. Moreover, the sheer size of the state and its own financial crisis demand that any growth management requirements must be to some degree self-enforcing rather than enforced by an army of Sacramento bureaucrats. The willing cooperation of local governments thus seems essential.

Unfortunately, our cases demonstrate that it is difficult to get local governments to be effective players in diverse stakeholder groups for many reasons. They lack staff support; they have difficulty developing clear positions because of their broad responsibilities; and the rhetoric of local officials sometimes does not mesh well with that of other participants. Except in the cases where local governments were principal players — Contra Costa, Coachella Valley, and San Diego — local representatives were the most often absent from meetings and most dissatisfied with results. Even in Contra Costa, local governments became major players only after failure of the first Measure C, in whose development they had played just a minor role. With these exceptions, we found few examples in which local government players asserted leadership in the processes. Instead, many expressed frustration and a sense of powerlessness.

It is possible that local governments have a fundamentally different interest than members of either the development or environmental community and reaching consensus may be difficult. An urban lobbyist in the Growth Management Consensus Project stated the basic problem:

Cities want a lot of flexibility at the local level. This conflicts with the developers, who want certainty. I would love a self-certification process for local plans, but developers don't want it. This is one of the key elements in the debates. We all had goals coming in except localities. Environmentalists want, no matter what, to save open space. Developers want certainty. Cities feel so battered. They are whining, but everything comes down to the city in the end. They have to balance everything. Everyone wants something from the cities.

One problem that particularly concerns local officials is the conflicting mandates they

have from state and federal agencies. As a League of Cities representative noted,

We keep saying that the state needs to make its own goals consistent, and put the state agencies together to resolve issues instead of expecting us to resolve the inconsistencies at the local level. We are victims of this failure. The state needs to get its act together.

Local governments have particular difficulty in assigning appropriate representatives for the time-consuming work of consensus building. In many of our cases cities were represented by elected officials, who have many responsibilities and many other competing regional meetings to attend. They also usually have at least part-time, if not full-time, other employment, and cannot take the time to be as well informed as those who are paid to participate. In addition, they are typically not expert in the matters before the group, as are many of the other stakeholder representatives. Many local elected officials use the emotional rhetoric of local control and private property rights, and thus speak a very different language from that of the other participants. One local staff member with substantial experience working with elected officials suggested this solution:

Elected officials should be brought in only last to sponsor proposals. Politicians are not long-term players. They want to know what they can do now. Do not include them until you have specifics that you want them to do.

Relying on staff as local government representatives also presents problems. Budget cutbacks of recent years mean that small-to-medium-size cities send staff to meetings only where they expect payoffs to their participation. The potential benefits of participation in many of these processes, however, are not clear to local governments. As a group they have not yet identified some objective they could seek from growth management and do not have enough staff to participate, like some agencies, in “damage control mode.” Often, local governments have found passive resistance to be their best defense against unwanted regulation. The calculation many make is that they will deal with the new mandates when and if they get them. The result in many of the consensus-building processes was that much of the time no one represented local governments.

We did find local governments to be effective and diligent participants in San Diego, where local governments led the growth management effort and knew they had much at stake. But it was also an effort in which the consensus groups were a less diverse combination of stakeholders. Local elected officials could be comfortable speaking with other local officials, and technical staff with each other in separate groups. It was also a case in which local governments knew the process would be important and assigned their staff to attend technical committee and other meetings. This case demonstrates that there is nothing inherent in local governments that prevents them from being effective participants in consensus building, but their needs and problems must be carefully addressed.

### **Cost Effectiveness of Consensus Building**

Although this study did not attempt to enumerate the costs of staffing and organizing these processes in any systematic way, the costs are low in comparison with the alternatives.<sup>26</sup> Even if all the donated hours and supplies and phone calls were accounted for, the combined cost to public agencies and private players of reaching agreements through consensus processes is far less than the costs of litigation, delayed projects, and restoring unprotected environments. In many cases, staff for consensus-building processes simply do tasks they would have been doing less effectively in other contexts. Even where technical information was generated or consultants were hired, the cost effectiveness of the work was higher than it is in many other policy analysis processes because the participants themselves requested and used the information. Little of the information produced was not seriously considered in relation to the issues on the table.

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<sup>26</sup> The 18-month, 35-member Growth Management Consensus Process required \$171,000 in cash contributions, \$25,000 in fees for retreats, and an estimated \$192,000 of in-kind contributions of staff time from public and private groups, for a grand total of nearly \$400,000 for a project designed to reform statewide policy. (From *Final Revenue Statement*, California State University Sacramento, Growth Management Consensus Project, July 1, 1990–December 31, 1991). The Economic and Environmental Recovery Coalition, which was only seven to 15 members during 14 months, and which relied less on professional facilitation, required \$82,000 in cash and in-kind contributions (from *Budget California Economic and Environmental Policy Mediation*, CSUS). Neither of these figures takes into account the hundreds of hours of time donated by group members, nor their travel costs.

By comparison, an impact assessment of New Jersey's consensually adopted state plan estimated that with the plan municipalities and school districts alone would save \$400 million annually, \$65 million of which would be saved in capital infrastructure costs statewide, and air and water pollution would be significantly lower (New Jersey Office of State Planning, and Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research, *Impact Assessment of the New Jersey Interim State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, February 1992).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

*State legislation should be designed to make consensus building an integral part of the development of growth management policies, plans, and implementation strategies.*

Consensus building plays an important role in coordinating growth management and potentially reduces costly conflicts. In so doing it permits the development and implementation of coherent policy in this complex arena.

*The state should establish and coordinate its own policies and programs related to growth and the environment.*

A principal obstacle to coordination at all levels is the conflicting messages and mandates that come from different state agencies. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that at least a few goals and broad principles at the state level are necessary to provide a framework for more specific plans by state agencies and regions and to establish criteria for resolving conflicts in agency missions.

*California should establish a state-level council, made up of agency directors, to set goals and priorities and coordinate state policies. This body should work with regional coordinating groups to develop consensually agreed-upon state strategy.*

This study shows that state agencies can achieve agreements among themselves and with other participants in consensus-building processes. In states where growth management programs have not included a responsible state council or commission, the legislature regularly has to prepare annual legislation to fill in gaps or correct initial programs, and regional players lack guidance. Such a council, along with regional goals, priorities, and policies, can provide the flexible and adaptive institutional framework that is needed to manage growth through consensus building. The social, intellectual, and political capital that are essential for institutionalizing long-term collaborative relationships depend on a consistent framework of expectations and processes that can be provided by a state council.

*Regional coordination and planning must be central to any growth management program.*

Growth management must have a regional focus. It is at the regional level where growth-related activities exert their effects. Metropolitan economies are regional in character, as are the activities of residents. Within regions are players with both the knowledge and the motivation to plan and implement growth management in consensually agreed-upon ways.

*The state should create strong incentives for regions to organize and for localities to join regional coordinating bodies and reach agreements. A primary incentive would be the requirement that state agencies follow regionally developed strategies that are consistent with state goals, priorities, and performance standards.*

Local governments should be offered at least two powerful incentives to cooperate with

each other in the region. The state should make infrastructure funding contingent upon cooperation. It should also offer regions where there is cooperation the chance to influence state investment and regulatory decisions. Changes are also needed, however, in the fiscal incentives and revenue-raising opportunities of local governments, which now discourage intergovernmental cooperation and encourage these governments to permit environmentally damaging forms of development. Incentives are likely to be more acceptable politically than sanctions for failures to cooperate. A regional strategy should be adopted consensually, with agreement of most jurisdictions within the region. Since the strategy will cover many issues and involve the distribution of both benefits and costs among localities, reaching agreement is feasible because many tradeoffs can be made. A region that does not adopt a growth management strategy of its own after two to five years could be subject to the state council's preparation of a strategy for the region.

*Regions should organize themselves, and establish consensually their own boundaries, institutional and interagency relationships, and committee structures and powers.*

As each region has a unique history and experience, and a unique distribution of responsibilities among its public agencies, participants must "own" their processes and design them to suit their own conditions and problems. Some regions already have the basis for cooperation in place. Some can involve a single county or COG. Others may require a system of subregions. No one-size-fits-all regional structure is appropriate for all regions in the state. Moreover, the structure of the regional coordinating group and its subgroups probably should evolve over time to adapt to emerging issues and problems.

*The state council should negotiate with each region to establish tasks and timelines, so that the differences among regions, the magnitude of their tasks, and the work they have already done can be taken into account.*

These tasks should be simply defined, leaving the details to be worked out at the regional level. Deadlines should depend on the scale and controversy of the tasks. It may be appropriate to establish statewide performance standards with interim targets suitable to different regions.

*The state council should negotiate performance standards, guidelines, or implementation strategies in a consensus-building way with regional bodies that have adopted regional coordination strategies and plans.*

These specifics of implementation may be more contentious than the setting of broad policy. Negotiation and consensus building in establishing standards and guidelines will anticipate or avoid many conflicts and assure that they take into account the diversity and unique characteristics of the different parts of this vast state. This negotiation will help assure support and implementation of state policy and objectives. The right to sit at the table with state agency heads can become a substantial incentive for the regions to organize themselves and for localities to cooperate in a regional context.

*The state council and regional coordinating body should be designated as the primary arenas for discussion. Where differences cannot be resolved within the region, mediation and conflict resolution services should be made available. Procedures should be established for*



*appealing decisions of the regional consensus group at the state level, possibly to the state council or a designated hearing board.*

Our cases show that where there are multiple arenas for decision-making or substantial ambiguity about how and where decisions will be made, consensus building is undermined. Stakeholders leave the table or have little incentive to make difficult choices. Insofar as is legally possible, state agencies should refrain from making decisions on issues while they are under consideration in regional arenas and should indicate to participants that their decisions will be respected if they are congruent with agencies' missions. In some cases the missions of state agencies may need to be changed to require them to consider growth management concerns in their decision-making. Mediation services, offered either through the state or drawing on the growing body of mediation professionals in the private and nonprofit sectors, can reduce the need for expensive and formal legal proceedings and appeals.

*The state should provide funding to staff the regional consensus-building efforts.*

Consensus-building processes will require technical, clerical, and administrative support, as well as support for professional facilitators to assist with particularly difficult tasks. The cost of staffing these processes is minor compared to the costs of conflict and failures to coordinate, which the state currently confronts. As these staff must be regarded as unbiased, the funding should not be controlled by an agency with growth management interests or one that is viewed as politically partisan.

*The state should cooperate with regions in building a shared information base to support consensus building.*

Consensually agreed-upon technical information can play a significant role in coordination and can become shared intellectual capital for all participants. This can occur not only within regional consensus processes, but also between regions and the state.

*The state should provide financial support to local governments so they can take leadership roles in the regional consensus processes.*

The willing and effective involvement of local governments in regional consensus building is crucial to the success of growth management, but the costs of participation are now high for them and the benefits uncertain. To participate at all, much less to take leadership roles, local governments need to believe they can adequately represent their interests, and therefore need to dedicate staff time to participation, as well as preparing technical analyses and proposals. Because of the budget crisis and their need to deal with such fundamental issues as public safety, local governments have little staff to devote to such activities.

*The state should provide training and other forms of direct technical assistance to those involved in consensus building.*

Meetings of public bodies, city councils, and commissions have followed formalized procedures that regulate debate over differences. Consensus building, in contrast, requires listening, cooperating with opponents, and looking for common ground. These methods can be taught through workshops to group leaders, who in turn teach their colleagues. The state could designate the task to university mediation groups, professional mediators in the private sector, or a state office. This is a low-cost activity that promises substantial benefits over time.

Once regional strategies are developed, localities can make necessary changes in their plans to make them consistent with regional strategies. A properly designed incentive structure can assure that localities have an interest in preparing plans that are consistent with regional strategies and state policies — and may be the most effective way of assuring local cooperation.

To require local plans to be consistent with state or regional plans, and detailed, centralized review of these plans, is both inefficient and politically unpopular. From experience in other states, such as Florida or Maine, it is not even clear that such requirements provide an effective way to coordinate local and regional actions, nor that plan consistency can be unambiguously determined. The regional consensus group should identify its own enforcement and compliance mechanisms for members. This type of self-policing is most likely to be effective. In any case, a locality or region would not receive state funding for transportation, infrastructure, schools, or other activities if they were inconsistent with state goals, priorities, and standards, and with the regional strategy. This in itself is likely to give localities the incentive to make plans congruent with regional strategy. The state should explore various strategies for assuring consistency of local plans and proposals with state and regional policy, including providing standing to certain interests and agencies to challenge the plans and proposals, as well as using a voluntary certification process whereby a “certified” plan would not be subject to such challenge. This is a complex matter which we believe should be worked out over time in the process of implementing growth management.

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