

Subject: Plan Bay Area 2040

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From: Kenneth Gibson

To: EIR Comments

The print and display versions of the Draft Plan Bay Area 2040 seem to be presented in summary form with little in terms of specific proposals as guidelines for planning and regulation by county and municipal governments and agencies within the nine county region. There is no detailed table of contents to display the structure of the document.

Certainly the thrust of planning for our region, consistent with the needs and desires of residents in the region should be to preserve open space and in particular natural habitat, to reduce air pollution and global warming and to make the experience of living and working in the Bay Area less stressful. From a planning perspective, land use and transportation resource development are critical to the realization of those planning outcomes. Land use can be impacted (and thence transportation needs) can be impacted by the cost of water used for irrigation. If water used for residential irrigation is perceived as relatively high, households will be less attracted to homes with extensive lawns.

Plan Bay Area 2040 should encourage water agencies to adopt water pricing policies that reduce or eliminate a fixed charge for residential (or any) potable water use. Water volume charges should be tiered from a very low price for minimal daily use (25 gallons or less per capita in a household) through many tiers (say ten or more) with each tier priced a multiple (say 125% or so) of the step below it.

Water metering technology currently in use should be replaced with smart meters so that water suppliers can focus personnel on water loss prevention rather than meter reading and so that each household, even in multi-unit buildings, can be billed monthly separately to focus the attention of those who control water use on the cost of high volume water use. While encouraging water conservation, such a change would be a significant step toward social equity.

The effect would be more dramatic if two other changes in the typical urban water bill were made. Water agencies typically bill water treatment costs to residential water users as a fixed amount every period. There is no justification for that approach. The bill should reflect the volume of potable water used by the household as that is the best available proxy for the wastewater generated. This would tend to shift inequity away from those who can least afford it onto those who can most afford it. It would also make the irrigation of large lots a more noticeable expense. This would make multi-unit housing relatively more attractive from a cost standpoint.

The other change would be have sewer charges billed more appropriately. In most Bay Area urban locations residential water users are billed for sewage on a flat rate basis. This charge should be made up of two components. A variable component would be driven by metered potable water use while a fixed component would be based on the hard surface (impermeable) area of the property (roofs, driveways, paved areas draining to the street) and half the width of its surrounding streets. Again, lawns and expanses of paving surrounding a property would raise the costs of "ownership." Satellite technology that has been used to develop household "water budgets" for water agency customers - justifying greater water use for some over others - should rather be used to more logically, accurately and fairly allocate sewer capacity costs.

This is a win-win for Plan Bay Area 2040 which promotes ideas for keeping the Bay Area livable. Land, air and water are all essential to that end.

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