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Cc: <mailto:league-of-cities-action-team@googlegroup.com>
Subject: ABAG: Plan Bay Area Regional Growth Forecast
Date: Wednesday, April 08, 2020 5:02:14 PM

External Email

Dear ABAG Executive Board:

Thank you for your work on behalf of communities throughout the Bay Area.

I'm currently elected to the Palo Alto City Council and have served for six years, including last year as Mayor of Palo Alto.

I sat in on the Regional Growth Forecast call this week by the PBA2050 Working Group. While I much appreciate the time and effort the Working Group has invested, the Forecast in its current form isn't yet useful as a Policy tool.

The impact of Covid-19 on California's economic and population growth and distribution is an obvious massive game-changer that must be considered. But even before that, the Forecast has taken too many of the wrong things as inputs, and not enough of the right ones.

For example, the Forecast mostly ignores the impacts of housing prices on job and population growth. To those of us grappling with these issues on the ground, this is absurd. In the South Bay, housing growth has actually kept pace with population growth for two years now, because of out-migration – this is now a dominant factor, yet the Forecast doesn't really consider it. Another example: in the Bay Area, the large and still-rising wealth inequality between the growing tech-sector workforce and everybody else has enormous locational and transportation implications – the Forecast abstracts over this entire issue.

Instead the Working Group mentioned very generic inputs such as nationwide ethnicity-weighted average fertility rates. Modeling the Bay Area's specialized and extremely international economy on birthrates in places like Miami, Des Moines and Cleveland is of dubious value. Furthermore, on the call at least, the Working Group struggled to answer even moderately complex questions around such issues with any material depth of insight.

It's a maxim of statisticians that, "all models are wrong, but some are useful." Alas, there seems to be such a large gap between major Forecast assumptions, and the reality of what we see on the ground, that this Forecast in its current form doesn't appear to be useful, for us as Policymakers.

I urge the Executive Board to commission another pass on this. Direct the Working Group to re-engage with local elected and community leaders at a close and open level, and resolve the conflicts between their current work and the facts on the ground. Even just the present unpredictability around Covid-19 would make such a move prudent; allocating this additional time would give enable the Group to come up with something of value and confidence for everybody.

Sincerely,
Eric Filseth