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Equitable & Resilient Communities

Designing Healthy, Equitable, Resilient, and Economically Vibrant Places

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"The future is not someplace we are going to, but a place we are creating. The paths to it are not found, they are made."

—Jane Garvey

Introduction

Addressing social equity in policy decisions is vital for the economy, the health of the population, community well-being, and climate policies that support all residents. In addition to investments in infrastructure, services, and amenities, policies to support community engagement and to foster human capital in local communities are vital to creating more thriving, healthy, resilient, and equitable places. Additionally, there are significant demographic shifts taking place across California including more aging seniors, increasing ethnic diversity, and changing household structures. [xxviii, xxix]

Cities, counties, regions, and states have increasingly been integrating equity principles into their policies and frameworks to increase opportunities for all to thrive. Disciplines such as transportation, housing, agriculture, energy, economic development, land use, health, and education are utilizing an equity framework to inform policy. [xxx, xxxi, xxxii, xxxiii] In the late 1960s, the urban planning equity movement recognized that through expanding choices and services to those with limited options, local jurisdictions could work towards improved planning outcomes and equity. [xxxiv] Equity is also one of the three key pillars in sustainable development and is recognized by the American Planning Association in its official policy on smart growth. Despite the growth and interest in advancing social equity and the recognition of its importance, one common definition has not emerged. [xxxv]

A few definitions include:

The National Academy of Public Administration defines social equity as:

> "The fair, just, and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy."[xxxvi]

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The American Planning Association defines social equity as:

> "The expansion of opportunities for betterment that are available to those communities most in need, creating more choices for those who have few."[xxxvii]

The California Planning Roundtable states that social equity "ensures that all groups enjoy the benefits of a healthy and prosperous community, with access to housing, transportation, jobs and commerce. It enables a variety of businesses to flourish."[xxxviii]

"Health equity" is defined in California law, as "efforts to ensure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives" (Health and Safety Code § 131019.5(a)(2)). "Determinants of equity" are recognized to mean "social, economic, geographic, political, and physical environmental conditions that lead to the creation of a fair and just society" (Health and Safety Code § 131019.5(a)(1)).

Geographic inequity describes a situation in which the burdens of undesirable land uses are concentrated in certain neighborhoods while the benefits are received elsewhere. It also describes a situation in which public amenities are concentrated only in certain areas.

Many communities have used a robust community engagement process to adopt their own working definition of social equity, with agreed upon goals for their equity work in land use and transit planning. This chapter will discuss how social equity is foundational to other planning issues such as environmental justice and healthy communities.

American Planning Association Policy on Smart Growth SOCIAL EQUITY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

The American Planning Association supports a sustained and focused initiative in federal, state, and local public policy to reverse the general decline of neighborhoods through strategies that promote citizen involvement and reinvestment within core communities.

The American Planning Association supports the application of smart growth principles to expand social equity in rural communities in ways that help preserve and strengthen their character.

The American Planning Association supports increased social, economic, and racial equity in our communities and calls on the federal government to increase community development funds to remedy these inequities and to ensure that planning and land development decisions do not unfairly burden economically disadvantaged groups.

The American Planning Association supports federal, state, and local policies and programs that encourage economically and socially diverse mixed income neighborhoods as the foundation for healthy regions, including encouragement for the provision of workforce housing in all new-growth areas and areas to be redeveloped.

The American Planning Association supports efforts to strengthen public education systems, including pre-K, as essential components of community building in urban, suburban, and rural areas, which help to ensure that children have an opportunity for an excellent education wherever they may live, and which provide a critical element for reinvestment in urban core communities.

The American Planning Association supports planning that identifies the transportation, housing, employment, education, recreation and health needs of our changing population, both with respect to the total number of people expected to reside in an area and also with respect to population groups with special needs such as the elderly, school children, or people of diverse cultures.

The American Planning Association supports public-private partnerships as a means to leverage funds to achieve social equity and community redevelopment.

Source: https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/smartgrowth.htm

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ELEMENTS

	Land Use	Circulation	Housing	Conservation	Open Space	Safety	Noise	EJ
Social Equity	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED	RELATED

■ Identified in statute   ■ Closely related to statutory requirements

Social Equity and other planning issues

Environmental Justice and Equity

Environmental justice (EJ) is defined in state planning law as the "fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (Gov. Code § 65040.12(e)). However, in addition to statute, there are several overlapping definitions and frameworks to contextualize EJ with ongoing robust conversation to define how it is related to social equity. In fact, EJ as a field has undergone tremendous expansion beyond the work that traditionally focused on the disproportionate burden of pollution and contaminants suffered by many communities of color to include access to services, healthy food, and affordable housing.[xxxix, xl] Not only does this expanded framework for EJ overlap with social equity, but it also overlaps with work traditionally associated with healthy community policies. This is evident in new EJ legislation, SB 1000, which requires pollution exposure reduction, including air quality, as well as policies to promote food access, safe and sanitary homes, and physical activities for disadvantaged communities. See the EJ section for more details.

EJ is considered an equity issue.[xli] It is an integral component of equity, but social equity also encompasses a larger framework such as access to jobs and economic opportunity, arts and culture, safety from violence, public administration, management of goods and services, access to education, and complete neighborhoods. Social equity is applied across the age range and various disciplines, and has many other nuances. For instance, an elderly population that has limited mobility could live in a neighborhood without safe, walkable streets or accessible public transit. Although it is not necessarily an EJ issue, the lack of mobility options is an important equity consideration. A low-income community that does not have access to parks – since historically they were not funded for development in lower-income areas – could be considered as having both EJ and equity issues. Equity can be used as the larger framework for ensuring opportunities for all in the community.

Healthy Communities and Equity

Healthy community work is also directly related to social equity. For decades, health researchers studied disparities in physical and mental health status among distinct segments of the population, including differences that occur by gender, age, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, income, disability or functional impairment, geographic location, or a combination of any of these factors.[xlii] Decades of research have demonstrated that health outcomes are linked to much more than merely access to health services or underlying genetics. The research uncovered that many social, economic, and environmental factors contribute directly to health outcomes. The increased understanding of these factors has led communities across the nation, with California leading, to work closely with planning departments to improve planning policies and the built environment to better support health. It is important to apply an equity framework to the healthy community work to ensure that efforts do not make health disparities worse. See the Healthy Communities Chapter for more details.

SB 244

SB 244, passed in 2011, specifically recognized that many disadvantaged unincorporated communities lacked adequate investment in infrastructure such as sidewalks, safe drinking water, and adequate waste processing. This lack of adequate investment threatens both health and safety of residents and creates inequity in terms of access to quality services.[xliii] SB 244 created procedural requirements to identify these areas of risk and update general plan policies to improve conditions. See OPR's Technical Advisory on SB244.

General Planning

In the context of creating a general plan, considering distribution of and access to resources within a community may help provide improved services and opportunities to thrive.

Cities and counties can prioritize access to public facilities and services that enhance quality of life, including but not limited to, public transportation options connected to job centers, housing, parks, open space, trails, greenbelts, recreational facilities (including senior and youth centers), community centers, grocery stores, health care facilities, child care centers, libraries, and cultural centers. Considering the number and quality of, and access to facilities is important. Many instances of inequity are not intentional, but manifest themselves in terms of process or results. Therefore, by increasing awareness, jurisdictions can modify processes that lead to inequity. For example, transportation decisions are often informed by commute times. However, commute times are calculated during specified hours. Often, service sector employees engage in "reverse commutes," traveling at later or earlier hours. Regular commuter calculations do not adequately capture service sector needs, so other data should be included.

Common definitions in reference to social equity

In conversations about equity, terms such as underserved, low-income, disadvantaged, or environmental justice community are often interchanged but can potentially have different meanings depending on the context. There are also different statutory definitions and references from various funding sources. It is helpful to clarify terminology. For instance, one could reference a disadvantaged community while referring to an elderly or disabled population that does not have adequate access to transit options. Alternatively, disadvantaged could

refer to children who do not have access to safe places to play. Several common terms have statutory definitions and others are used more generally. Additionally, many state and federal programs utilize the statutory definitions to determine funding for programs, and that too can vary. Some of the most applicable terms to local planning are below and apply where there is no other prevailing statutory definition.

Statutory definitions

Definitions pertinent to SB 1000

Disadvantaged Community Government Code Section 65302

"Disadvantaged communities means an area identified by the California Environmental Protection Agency Pursuant to Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code OR an area that is a low-income area that is disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation."

Low-Income Area Government Code Section 65302

"Low-income Area means an area with household incomes at or below 80 percent of the statewide median income OR with household incomes at or below the threshold designated as low income by the Department of Housing and Community Development's list of state income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093."

Definition in the water code

Disadvantaged Community Public Resources Code Section 75005, Water Code Section 79505.5

A "Disadvantaged Community" is a community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide median household income. "Severely disadvantaged community" means a community with a median household income less than 60 percent of the statewide average.

Definitions pertinent to SB 244

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Community as per SB 244 Government Code Section 65302.10 (a)

"**Community**" means an inhabited area within a city or county that is comprised of no less than 10 dwellings adjacent or in close proximity to one another.

"**Disadvantaged unincorporated community**" means a fringe, island, or legacy community in which the median household income is 80 percent or less than the statewide median household income.

"**Island community**" means any inhabited and unincorporated territory that is surrounded or substantially surrounded by one or more cities or by one or more cities and a county boundary or the Pacific Ocean.

"**Fringe community**" means any inhabited and unincorporated territory that is within a city's sphere of influence.

"**Legacy community**" means a geographically isolated community that is inhabited and has existed for at least 50 years.

Environmental Justice Government Code Section 65040.12(e)

EJ is defined in state planning law as the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

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Health Equity Health and Safety Code Section 131019.5

Recognizes "determinants of equity" means social, economic, geographic, political, and physical environmental conditions that lead to the creation of a fair and just society. Furthermore, "Health equity" means efforts to ensure that all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives.

Incorporating social equity into planning: examples and strategies

There is not one way to incorporate equity into a general plan, but there are unifying approaches to integration. A local jurisdiction should consider using an equity framework as the basis to start its planning process.

Vision, Outreach and Engagement

Robust community engagement to capture all voices within the community from the beginning of the general plan update is vital to creating a shared vision with significant community support, resulting in a plan that is more likely to acknowledge community challenges and accurately account for existing community assets. Engaging multiple groups also leverages community expertise. Partnership and engagement with diverse stakeholders also helps create more support for the plan during the approval process. There are many actions a local agency can take to support engagement from all sectors and groups within the local community. Focused outreach efforts to specific groups that work on equity issues, such as local community-based organizations, can be an effective way to incorporate an equity framework. If consultants manage public outreach, it can also be helpful to have a city or county staff assigned to serve as a liaison or oversee the outreach process for continuity after the project ends. This also provides for consistent and ongoing communication after plan adoption and implementation updates with the community.

As emphasized in the second chapter, A Vision for Long-Range Planning, coordinating with local agencies is important when seeking to implement many of the policies that provide more equitable access to resources. The Community Engagement and Outreach chapter provides more detailed guidance on ways to effectively engage with the community. SB 1000 also has statutory language about civil engagement.

Incorporating Data, Mapping, and Other Tools

An important step in the process of incorporating equity considerations is to integrate it into the analysis of existing conditions. Jurisdictions have to collect at least jurisdiction-wide socioeconomic data during the preparation of the housing element, such as income levels and persons with special housing needs (elderly, farmworkers, single heads of households, etc.). However, a more complete socioeconomic picture of the community can be analyzed using smaller geographic data sets, less than jurisdiction-wide, such as census tracts, which allows a comparison of different areas throughout a community. Data sources are mentioned throughout the General Plan Guidelines.

Some examples of local jurisdictions both within and outside of California that have done mapping projects to incorporate equity into policy decision making processes include:

- Denver

- Portland-Vancouver

- Atlanta

- New York

- Riverside

- Los Angeles

Incorporating Supportive Policies

An analysis of existing conditions combined with robust community input can help bring particular policy issues to the forefront for discussion. As policy priorities are established, formulating strong policy language is a key first step. For example, rather than "consider implementing" use the word "implement." Also, instead of using the phrase "consider the development of," use "develop and implement." Additionally, to create more actionable policy language use "priority on" rather than "emphasis on" to highlight policy areas of particular focus.

Community Resilience

Community resilience refers to the ability of a community to respond, recover, and adapt, and do so dynamically. It is directly related to equity. Incorporating equity considerations from the beginning of the planning process offers the potential to decrease vulnerability in the community in terms of infrastructure and human capital. "Vulnerability is the flip side of resilience: when a social or ecological system loses resilience it becomes vulnerable to change that previously could be absorbed."[xliv] Akin to the circulation of traffic, if power is lost and a traffic light goes out, a bottleneck will occur, slowing traffic down across the entire area, not just the focused area where the light went out. This means the system is vulnerable and not resilient.

When other systems within a community are vulnerable, the effects can ripple throughout the area as well. Incorporating social equity is a key strategy for local governments to create resilient communities.

The Rockefeller Foundation has conducted extensive research on what drivers are important to support resiliency. Using that research, they have implemented lessons learned through practical experience with cities across the globe. Many of the lessons can be modified to apply to land use planning. Adapting their framework to apply to a general plan, local jurisdictions can ask a number of questions during the update and at the end of the process to measure how they are addressing resilience. If resilience was incorporated from the beginning, it is much more likely the series of questions will have affirmative responses and the policies will support resilience community-wide.

Questions informed and adapted from the Rockefeller Foundation Resiliency Framework that could be used by a local jurisdiction as it updates its general plan include: [xlv]

Health and Wellbeing

- How do the policies help community members meet their basic needs?

- How do the policies help create opportunities to support basic needs, such as job training, skills, housing, and job fit?

- How do the policies ensure access to facilities and services, such as emergency services, mental health, and health care services?

Economy and Society

- How do the policies encourage community engagement in the planning process and strengthen social networks?

- How do the policies strengthen crime prevention and safe places?

- How do the policies foster more economic prosperity?

Infrastructure and Environment

- How do these policies conserve our local environmental assets and preserve natural ecosystems?

- How do these policies help maintain our infrastructure and ecosystems?

- How do these policies support multimodal transit and diverse network options?

Leadership and Strategy

- How has data informed the policy development? Were multiple sectors consulted during policy formation?

- Did this general plan update allow for increased organizational capacity, education, and increased awareness between stakeholders and the local government?

- Did data inform the holistic vision that can be integrated across different land use plans, sectors, and users?

Some examples of local jurisdictions both within and outside of California that have incorporated resiliency as a key framework for planning include:

- Boston – Boston has specifically included social cohesion into their framework and has hosted discussions on race and equity to further resilience locally.

- San Francisco – San Francisco, at high-risk for earthquakes and natural disasters, has made resilience around physical infrastructure a priority.

- Atlanta – Atlanta is looking closely at its transit and aging infrastructure.

- Los Angeles – Los Angeles prioritizes addressing poverty as a key to improving resiliency.

The long-range nature of policies in the general plan, as well as the multi-agency and diverse stakeholder involvement, provides an opportunity to incorporate equity. This creates the potential to create a more resilient community.

OPR Recommended Policies

These policies are an example of recommended policies adopted by varying jurisdictions, to be modified and used as appropriate. A full list of recommended policies can be found here.

Sample Policy	Example of Application	Relationship to Other Elements
[City, county] shall develop programs to attract and retain industries that can provide a living wage, provide health insurance benefits, and meet existing levels of workforce education.	City of Murrieta	Land use, housing, healthy communities, economic development
[City, county] shall prioritize projects that significantly address social and economic needs of the economically vulnerable populations. Address and reverse the underlying socioeconomic factors and residential social segregation in the community that contributes to crime and violence in the city.	City of Richmond	Environmental justice, safety, economic development
[City, county] shall encourage activities such as block parties and community–wide social events, that strengthen neighborhood cohesion and the overall identity of the City.	City of El Monte	Safety, healthy communities
[City, county] shall enhance low income independent housing for seniors, continue to develop and expand senior housing services.	Marin County	Land use, housing environmental justice healthy communities