

Glossary of Planning Terms

BENEFIT ASSESSMENT DISTRICT:

An area within a public agency's boundaries that receives a special benefit from the construction of one or more public facilities.

A Benefit Assessment District has no independent life; it is strictly a financing mechanism for providing public infrastructure as allowed under various statutes. Bonds may be issued to finance the improvements, subject to repayment by assessments charged against the benefiting properties. Creation of a Benefit Assessment District enables property owners in a specific area to cause the construction of public facilities or to maintain them (for example, a downtown, or the grounds and landscaping of a specific area) by contributing their fair share of the construction and/or installation and operating costs.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

(CIP): A program established by a city or county government and reviewed by its planning commission, which schedules permanent improvements, usually for a minimum of five years in the future, to

fit the projected fiscal capability of the local jurisdiction. The program generally is reviewed annually, for conformance to and consistency with the general plan.

CHARTER CITY: Larger California cities, as well as older small cities, are "charter cities," meaning they have more discretion within their city charters to establish land use processes. Most smaller cities are "general law cities" meaning they do not have a city charter and must adhere to state law. There are 481 incorporated cities in California, 86 of which are charter cities.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES DISTRICT:

Under the Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982, a legislative body may create within its jurisdiction a special tax district that can finance tax-exempt bonds for the planning, design, acquisition, construction, and/or operation of public facilities, as well as public services for district residents. Special taxes levied solely within the district are used to repay the bonds.

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH:

The range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that influence health status are known as Determinants of Health. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion categorizes determinants of health into five broad groups: (1) Policymaking, (2) Social factors, (3) Health services (4) Individual behavior, and (5) Biology and genetics. This concept is significant to planning because it recognizes the need for creating health-

promoting environments and policies, rather than the onus of health resting solely on individual behavior.

DESIGN CHARRETTE: Also called a planning charrette, design charrettes are interactive, visual, and time-intensive events where the public can participate with interdisciplinary teams of planners, architects, engineers, artists, and fellow citizens. While charrettes are often used for specific plans, they can also help community members visualize what they want their community to look like. The process cultivates creativity, offers the advantage of giving the designers immediate feedback, and allows everyone who participates to be a mutual author of the plan.

DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT:

A legislatively approved contract between a jurisdiction and a person having legal or equitable interest in real property within the jurisdiction that "freezes" certain rules, regulations, and policies applicable to development of a property for a specified period of time, usually in exchange for certain concessions by the owner.

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY

(DAC): An area with higher cumulative environmental, health, and economic burdens (such as poverty and pollution). The California EPA (CalEPA) and California Air Resources Board (CARB) use CalEnviroScreen to designate DACs throughout the state, which are specifically targeted for the investment

of funds generated by CARB's cap-and-trade program.

EASEMENT, CONSERVATION: A tool for acquiring open space with less than full-price purchase, whereby a public agency buys only certain specific rights from the land owner. These may be positive rights (providing the public with the opportunity to hunt, fish, hike, or ride over the land) or they may be restrictive rights (limiting the uses to which the land owner may devote the land in the future.)

SCENIC: A tool that allows a public agency to use an owner's land for scenic enhancements such as roadside landscaping or vista preservation.

EMINENT DOMAIN: The right of the government to take away property from its owner for public use. The property is purchased, but not always with a willing seller. Traditionally local governments used this power only for schools, roads, and other publicly-owned projects. However, a 1984 Supreme Court case ruled that eminent domain could be used in cases where the land would ultimately end up privately owned, paving the way for redevelopment projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR): A detailed informational document that describes and analyzes a project's significant environmental effects, and discusses ways to mitigate or avoid those effects. Required by CEQA.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (EJ): The EPA defines EJ as: "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys (1) the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and (2) equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work." California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) defines EJ as: "the basic right of people to live, work, go to school, play and pray in a healthy and clean environment"

FIRE HAZARD ZONE: An area where, due to slope, fuel, weather, or other fire-related conditions, the potential loss of life and property from a fire necessitates special fire protection measures and planning before development occurs.

FORM-BASED CODE: A design code created "to physically define streets and public spaces as places of shared use, and to build complete neighborhoods that are compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed-use." Form-Based Code was developed in response to the sprawl caused by conventional zoning. It focuses more on the public space and physical form, and less on land use and single-use zoning.

GENERAL PLAN: Every city and county must adopt "a comprehensive, long-term general plan" (Gov. Code § 65300). The purpose of a general plan is to guide land use planning decisions. Under state law, subdivisions, capital improvements, development agreements, and many other land use actions must be consistent with the adopted general plan. In counties and general law cities, zoning and specific plans are also required to conform to the general plan.

GENTRIFICATION/DISPLACEMENT: The way that a neighborhood's cost of living and social structure change as a result of an influx of wealthier people and prospective development. Green Gentrification, also called "environmental gentrification," is a term used to describe when the cleaning up of pollution or providing green amenities increases local property values spurs gentrification in a formerly disenfranchised neighborhood.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: A term commonly used to describe the use of natural systems for stormwater management (an alternative to man-made materials of Grey Infrastructure). The American Association of Landscape Architects describes green infrastructure as when "nature is harnessed by people and used as an infrastructural system" and that "while it's often closely associated with green stormwater management systems... it's really bigger than that," including wildlife protection, parks and urban forests, and transportation systems.

GREY INFRASTRUCTURE: A term refers to the traditional methods of managing and treating water, using man-made assets such as channels, pipes, sewers and sewage treatment plants, ditches, and tunnels. Greywater refers to domestic wastewater.

IMPACT FEE: A fee, also called a development fee, levied on the developer of a project by a city, county, or other public agency as compensation for otherwise unmitigated impacts the project will produce. Government Code §66000 specifies that development fees shall not exceed the estimated reasonable cost of providing the service for which the fee is charged. To lawfully impose a development fee, the public agency must verify its method of calculation and document proper restrictions on use of the fund. Impact/development fees may be used to pay for preparing and updating general plans and specific plans.

INCORPORATION: The process by which an area of a county or existing city becomes an independent city. Thus, many towns may be “unincorporated” and fall under the jurisdiction of a county’s general plan. California law makes no distinction between “city” and “town,” and municipalities may use either term in their official names.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA): An act passed in 1974 establishing federal legislation for national environmental policy, a council on environmental quality, and the requirements for environmental impact statements.

NIMBYism: Short for “not in my backyard,” which refers to the attitude of residents who oppose a certain development due to its proximity to them. NIMBYism frequently occurs in situations with residents who agree the project is needed or beneficial (like a prison, power plant, or transit line), but simply don’t want it nearby. NIMBYism relates to Environmental Justice, as those with more clout can often advocate for such developments to be moved out of their area, pushing them to neighborhoods of those with less political power to object.

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT: Open-Space Land: Any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open-space use for the purposes of (1) the preservation of natural resources, (2) the managed production of resources, (3) outdoor recreation, or (4) public health and safety.

PLANNING: The process by which public agencies determine the intensity and geographical arrangements of various land uses in a community. The planning process and field emerged from two traditions: (1) architecture and landscape architecture and (2) the tradition of the law. William Fulton explains, “the plan provides the visionary guidance, while the law provides the power to implement that vision.”

PLANNING COMMISSION: a permanent committee made up of five or more individuals who have been appointed by the governing

body (city council or board of supervisors) to review and act on matters related to planning and development.

PUBLIC REALM: Public spaces where people interact, including the space between and within public buildings, streets, squares, parks and open spaces

REDLINING: The practice in which lenders denied home loans to certain mapped areas, largely based on demographics, from 1934 to 1977. By denying people of color access homeownership, and thus the opportunity to build equity, redlining spurred racial wealth gaps for generations, affecting communities to this day. **Greenlining** is a term used for efforts aimed at increasing investment in neighborhoods which have been redlined or are otherwise disadvantaged.

SPECIFIC PLAN: A tool authorized by Government Code §65450 for the systematic implementation of the general plan for a defined portion of a community’s planning area. A specific plan must specify in detail the land uses, public and private facilities needed to support the land uses, phasing of development, standards for the conservation, development, and use of natural resources, and a program of implementation measures, including financing measures.

SIDEWALK ZONES: A well-designed sidewalk has a series of zones. Starting from the building side, they are commonly defined as: (1) the Frontage zone, which connects

pedestrians to the business inside and is the place for book tables, clothing racks, sidewalk dining, or benches, (2) the Clear Zone or Throughway Zone, which is for pedestrian travel, (3) the Furnishing Zone or Tree Zone, which is for trees, other landscaping, bike racks, street furniture, transit stops, and lighting, (4) the Edge Zone, for people getting in and out of cars, and finally (5) the Extension zone, where pedestrian space may extend into the parking area with elements like bulb-outs or parklets.

STREETSCAPE: The design and condition of a street, in recognition of the street as a public space and the promotion of greater sidewalks use. Streetscape elements include bike racks, benches (or “street furniture”), planters, decorative lighting, art, and even trash cans. Also referenced as street-scale features.

STORMWATER RUNOFF: Precipitation that flows into a man-made drainage system, picking up pollutants along the way, rather than water that directly flows into a creek, stream, lake or ocean.

TRANSECT: Naturalists use a concept called “the transect” to describe the characteristics of ecosystems and the transition from one ecosystem to another. Planner Andres Duany applied this concept to human settlements, and the idea is common in New Urbanist thinking. Yin explains, “the transect planning approach uses an idealized version of how entire cities and regions could be designed...

This approach is being used by communities to help understand how their places fit into the broader area.” SmartCode is transect-based.

TRANSPORTATION/TRANSIT:

Transportation encompasses all forms of travelling to and within a city, including auto, mass transit, and active transportation. Transit refers to public/mass transportation such as buses, light rail, subway, etc. Active Transportation refers to human-powered modes of transportation, such as walking and biking.

ZONING: The division of a city into districts and the application of different regulations in each district. Historically, single-use zoning practices have led to sprawl and environmental justice issues . Many planners are beginning to rethink how zoning polices can be improved to promote healthier communities for all.