

### ULI Los Angeles

## Reality Check on Growth

### Project Summary

ULI Los Angeles, in partnership with the University of Southern California (USC) Lusk Center for Real Estate, conducted a visioning exercise in October 2002 to raise awareness of the impending population increase forecasted for the region. Close to 200 community leaders from the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors

gathered to try to envision where to accommodate the Los Angeles region's projected growth. The outcome of the exercise was a series of growth models presenting alternative visions for how Los Angeles might accommodate new residents.

### Background

The 20,000-square-mile, five-county Los Angeles region—comprising Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernadino, Orange, and Riverside counties—is projected to grow by 6 million new residents and 2.2 million new jobs by 2020. The question facing the region's leaders, therefore, was not whether there will be growth, but where these people and jobs will be accommodated. Even though it is famous for its traffic congestion and housing shortages, the Los Angeles region continues to appeal to newcomers, who demand jobs, recreation, and housing choices. Planning for this future growth is crucial.

In 2001, ULI Los Angeles and the Lusk Center for Real Estate held the "Strategies for Solutions Summit," which focused on the growth challenge

facing southern California. A key recommendation that came out of this forum was the need to conduct a regional visioning process. Shortly thereafter, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) announced it would be conducting a multiyear, multimillion-dollar "Growth Visioning for Sustaining a Livable Region Work Program." These organizations saw the value of engaging the region's business and community leaders and policy makers in a case-study exercise to illustrate the effectiveness of growth visioning and to create excitement and commitment to the SCAG growth visioning program. Reality Check on Growth, therefore, would demonstrate the need for SCAG's multiyear program.

## Implementation

In creating Reality Check on Growth, its designers looked to other visioning exercises for inspiration, including processes undertaken in Chicago, Illinois; San Diego and Azusa, California; and Utah. Reality Check was designed as a two-phase, one-day session involving a three-hour envisioning session followed by data analysis. Like other popular visioning programs, it involved placing land use “chips” on maps.

In October 2002, 200 carefully selected political, business, development, community, and environmental leaders and experts were brought together. At the start of the day, participants were assigned to groups of eight to ten. Specifically formed to include individuals of diverse interests and backgrounds, the groups represented all “sides” of growth and land development issues.

Each group was provided with an identical map of the region. While this base map indicated infrastructure and natural features, including land uses, railways, freeways, open space, floodplains, military bases, waterways, reservations, and growth boundaries, all jurisdictional borders were removed so as not to influence the groups’ decisions on where to locate new development. The groups also were given an equal number of paper chips that represented both a land use type and the footprint needed to accommodate a use at the represented density. The chips were designated as single-family detached housing, apartments, office space, manufacturing, and retail. When totaled, the chips represented the amount of land required to accommodate the projected population and job growth, which is approximately 2 million housing units and 2.2 million jobs. In this first phase of the exercise, participants were given three hours to place all of the chips on the map.

The original set of chips distributed to each group was based on the current land use trends in southern California. Under this scenario, 74 percent of the projected population would live in single-family detached homes; 20 percent in medium-density apartments and townhomes; and 6 percent in high-density housing. Similarly, the commercial chips were divided into four categories representing different jobs per acre.

The areas on the map were color coded. Some of the colors represented current densities. Others represented areas that were politically restricted from being developed. Quickly recognizing that current densities are untenable—i.e., all the chips would not fit on the map—each group had two options for changing the mix of future development and for using all of its chips. The group could trade in its chips for higher-density chips and use them to create denser land use patterns in currently undeveloped areas. Or the group could place medium- and high-density residential chips on existing low-density residential areas. All teams quickly discovered that there was not enough room on the map to place all of the low-density chips on undeveloped areas. Therefore, every team went to the bank to exchange low-density chips for higher-density ones.

At the end of the map/chip phase, students and staff from the USC GIS Research Laboratory spent two hours collecting the maps, analyzing the data, and reporting back to the workshop on the growth scenarios laid out on the maps at the various tables. Once the data from the maps were compiled, the following commonalities were found:

- Most groups recognized the need for more infill development, and there was strong consensus that a majority of the population and jobs should be located in areas that already have significant development.
- All groups used higher housing densities and most agreed that at least half of the single-family detached residential houses should be developed at a higher density.
- Participants recognized the need for major investment in transportation, water, and sewer systems, and most groups stressed investment in new infrastructure.
- Most groups opted for new “satellite cities” to accommodate a significant share of the population and job growth.
- Some envisioned dense urban infill development in transit corridors.
- Given the shortage of vacant, developable land, most groups were forced to place growth in locations previously considered “unthinkable,” such as former military property and agricultural lands.
- Even without having jurisdictional boundaries on their maps, most participants envisioned doubling the population of Ventura County, which recently had passed strict antigrowth legislation.

Since October 2002, Reality Check on Growth has received extraordinary attention. Several key Reality Check organizers have been invited to various organizations’ smart growth conferences, meetings, and other events. They also have been involved in bringing the exercise and its outcomes to the attention of the new governor and his cabinet.

## **Partners**

Reality Check on Growth was led by partners ULI Los Angeles and the Lusk Center for Real Estate. Each of the following organizations played an important role in the success of the initiative:

- Southern California Transportation and Land Use Coalition;
- University of Southern California Casden Real Estate Economics Forecast;
- University of Southern California GIS Research Laboratory; and
- Southern California Association of Governments.

## ***ULI in the Community***

C A S E S T U D I E S F O R A C T I O N

### **Project Funding**

ULI Los Angeles mounted a major fundraising effort to assemble the \$90,000 that the project cost. This total accounts for hard costs but does not include staff labor, which was provided on a volunteer basis from each of the partners and sponsoring organizations. The bulk of the expense was for the GIS services and support in creating the base map as well as the computer application program to analyze the data. Other costs included the printing and mailing of the guidebook and other event materials, media outreach, the production of an event video, and the event itself, including audio and visual equipment rental, room rental, signage, and food.

Funding for Reality Check on Growth came through several levels of sponsorship. Sponsors included Bank of America; the James Irvine

Foundation; the La Jolla Group; the Urban Land Institute; Cushman & Wakefield of California, Inc.; Ernst & Young; First American Title Insurance Company; ARCS Commercial Mortgage Company; City National Bank; Randall W. Lewis, Lewis Operating Corp.; Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; the Newhall Land & Farming Company; Trillium Telecom Service, LLC; and Weston, Benshoof, Rochefort, Rubalcava & MacCuish, LLP.

In addition, Reality Check participants were charged a participation fee. Those from the for-profit sector paid \$300; members of non-profit organizations and those from the public sector were charged \$150.

### **Lessons Learned/Experience Gained**

■ **A successful visioning exercise requires a substantial planning effort and a thoughtful participant invitation list.**

It took ten months of intensive planning to bring Reality Check on Growth to life. Bringing together 300 people (including the 200 participants and almost 100 staff, GIS technicians, and others) to complete a one-day visioning exercise was a formidable task that necessitated not only a clear agenda, but also the proper people around the tables. The GIS portion of the day required a talented, experienced crew that could compile and analyze large data sets under intense time pressure and present the results in an engaging way. Without such a carefully devised team, Reality Check could not have met its goals.

■ **Preconceptions about growth can be changed and consensus can be reached, even among highly disparate stakeholders.**

Reality Check on Growth proved that diverse stakeholders with varied objectives could work together and agree on common goals for the entire region. By the end of the day, they had shared priorities, mediated familiar conflicts of interest, and generated innovative ideas envisioning possibilities for the future.

■ **Reality Check on Growth allows leaders to learn by doing.**

Because the results are displayed graphically and the exercise is completed within one business day's time, participants get immediate results and a sense of accomplishment.

- **Reality Check on Growth can be a stimulus for further exploration into how a region can grow.** Reality Check on Growth has served as an impetus for civic and political leadership to take steps toward developing better plans to accommodate growth in the region. Reality Check participants continue to work toward identifying and implementing regional planning goals in a growing and effective coalition.
- **As a follow-up to the visioning exercise, a survey of participants verified Reality Check on Growth's impact.** As participants arrived to take part in the Reality Check exercise, they were given a survey asking them what they expected to achieve that day, and how they felt about growth issues in the region. At the conclusion of the exercise, a second survey was distributed. When the two surveys were compared, it became clear just how influential the exercise was. Two main themes that came out of the survey included the recognized need for mixed-use centers and walkable communities. Survey results also showed a shift away from support for road investments and toward increasing funding for public transportation investments as well as for other alternative modes of transportation.
- **Planning for follow-up should be an integral part of the program from the beginning.** Implementation of the exercise results should be considered during the planning stage of the initiative. Such planning offers event organizers an opportunity to plan how the results will be disseminated, how to apply what they learned, and how the results can be used as a basis for influencing public policy.
- **Strong media coverage will help convey the message.** Because of the participatory and collaborative nature of the exercise, Reality Check on Growth drew significant media attention in a variety of forms, including live radio broadcasts and coverage in a variety of newspapers. Such publicity is crucial to building interest in and awareness of the exercise and creating an atmosphere that supports moving forward to implement the outcomes of the workshop.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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**Information on Reality Check on Growth can be found on ULI Los Angeles's Web site at [www.la.uli.org](http://www.la.uli.org).**