

# The Modesto Bee

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## Toss book on growth, report urges

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### Study would put planning in state lawmakers' hands

California's air would be cleaner if city and county leaders would stop making bad decisions on where to build houses and stores, according to a new state report.

Poor development decisions also contribute to global warming, according to the California Energy Commission's study.

"The Role of Land Use in Meeting California's Energy and Climate Change Goals" makes the extraordinary recommendation that legislators mandate regional growth plans that could be used to create a statewide growth plan.

That could mean stripping land-use decisions from tunnel-visioned city and county leaders who would lose one of their most important powers.

"There must be a concentrated and collaborative process to identify where, and in what way, long-term growth should and should not occur in the state," the staff report reads.

Claudia Chandler, assistant executive director for the Energy Commission, said, "California is not going to be inhabitable" in 40 years or so if decision-makers don't change their thinking. "Business as usual," she said, "won't get us to where we need to be."

The document also urges new studies on how tax laws facilitate lousy planning.

Proposition 13, embraced by California voters in 1978, holds down property taxes but inadvertently promotes sprawl, the report found. That's because strip malls and big-box centers became low-hanging fruit for cash-poor local governments in search of easy revenue sources. Such retail developments require more driving.

More driving means more greenhouse gas emissions, leading to poor air quality and ultimately, climate change, the study found.

The same decision-makers during the past three decades introduced the phenomenon of long commutes by providing inexpensive housing far from jobs, according to the report.

"This report looks at location, location, location," Chandler said. "Thirty years ago, people would have thought you were nuts to live in Modesto and drive to the Bay Area for your job. Now, it's pretty common."

Study sounds familiar theme

Carol Whiteside, president of the Modesto-based Great Valley Center, said leaders can craft "back to the future" plans by regularly calling for grocery stores, for instance, within new housing projects. Children chauffeured to school should have the option of walking, she said.

"In many ways, this requires a change of culture," Whiteside said. "A lot of people grew up that way. It's back to the future."

Rudy Platzek of Ceres hears a familiar strain in the report's push for regional government. Two years ago, he and Modesto's Bruce Jones, both disillusioned former planners, drafted a proposal for regional planning that failed to gain support in Sacramento.

"I wholeheartedly believe" that air quality is tied to sprawl, Platzek said this week.

Regional planners, the theory goes, can look beyond a craving to boost local taxes and make decisions for the best of a multicounty area. Dirty air respects no artificial jurisdictional boundary, supporters of regional planning say.

Will local leaders cede power?

Is this report going to persuade city and county leaders to yield power over land-use decisions?

"It's not," said Marjie Kirn, deputy executive director of the Merced Association of Governments. She leads the Regional Blueprint Planning Program for eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley, from Lodi to Bakersfield.

"(Local leaders) are not going to give up that right," Kirn continued. "But they can make different choices with more information," such as that contained in the report, she said.

The report is among several technical documents to be compiled in the 2007 Integrated Energy

**Policy Report, scheduled for review in November by energy commissioners. They would send it on to legislators and Gov. Schwarzenegger, who would issue a response within three months.**

**The report grew out of a 2005 Schwarzenegger edict and last year's Assembly Bill 32, both of which target emissions reduction. Transportation produces about 40 percent of emissions in California, the Energy Commission said.**

**State Attorney General Jerry Brown in April sued San Bernardino County, saying its growth plan did not contemplate effects on climate change, and he threatened 13 other jurisdictions. San Bernardino agreed to establish a plan on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.**

**On the Web: [www.energy.ca.gov/2007publications/CEC-600-2007-008/CEC-600-2007-008-SF.pdf](http://www.energy.ca.gov/2007publications/CEC-600-2007-008/CEC-600-2007-008-SF.pdf).**

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