Good News From the Grocery Industry: Research shows that people are more likely to walk or bike to pick up groceries if they live close to a store. Walking is not only good for the residents of a community; it’s good for the planet. In California, auto emissions are a major source of air pollution and greenhouse gas pollution.

Many communities have inserted language in their general plans advising that a grocery store should be sited within walking distance of every residence. The Bozeman, Montana Community Plan, for example, calls for about a dozen such neighborhood commercial centers. They are to be “spaced around the community in a kind of a satellite configuration so that as the community grows and develops, these neighborhood centers will be within walking distance.” The City of Chico was given an Ahwahnee Award some years ago for a similar plan to put neighborhood centers within walking distance of every resident.

This has been a difficult policy to enforce, however. Retailers continue their quest to increase the customer base of each store by drawing from a larger and larger geographic area. A case in point, a new Wal-Mart opening in the Sacramento region features a king-sized store of 238,000 square feet and two drive-through lanes! But while store size is growing, smaller neighborhood stores are closing their doors.

Fortunately, a British company sees the need and is on the way! Tesco, Britain’s largest retailer, is spending as much as $2 billion to launch Fresh and Easy Neighborhood Markets at neighborhood locations away from huge shopping centers. The 10,000 square foot stores will feature fresh but affordable, “less processed” food and won’t use artificial colors, artificial flavors and added trans fats. They will also not be selling cigarettes.

The stores are being designed to use less energy for lighting and refrigeration, some will have solar panels, and shipping and packing materials will be either recycled or reused.

Fortunately, the company has made the decision to locate stores in lower-income neighborhoods, not just more affluent communities. This is addressing a serious need. Many poorer neighborhoods have a more-than-adequate customer base to make stores commercially viable but it has been difficult to convince supermarkets to locate there. As a result, residents of many low-income neighborhoods have nowhere to go for food except fast food restaurants or liquor stores. Medical researchers have identified this as one cause of the obesity crisis.

The first Tesco stores are set to open in late October or early November, starting in Southern California, Las Vegas, and Phoenix.

Meanwhile, the California Supreme Court has recently given local governments more authority to determine what size of grocery store can move into their communities and where they can be located. Under the ruling, communities will be able to ban big-box stores. The court also made it clear that elected officials are entitled to decide what kind of commercial development they prefer, regardless of whether big-box stores are allowed, even if the effect is to restrict competition. They simply need to give a public interest reason for the denial of a project.

Wal-Mart, which unsuccessfully challenged a City of Turlock decision to turn down a super center last year, has estimated that 20 cities and counties in Northern California ban or limit its stores. The Supreme Court ruling will likely affect all battles in California where big-box retailers are trying to force their way into communities that don’t want them.

Seniors A Growing Constituency for Neighborhood Markets: The residents of our communities are growing older. After the majority of the baby boomers reach what is traditionally considered retirement age, the number of adults over the age of 65 will double to make up about 20% of our nation’s population.

One-fifth of adults over 65 do not drive, reducing their ability to meet critical daily needs. Getting groceries, going to the doctor, and engaging in social activities become a serious challenge and place more pressure on public services, particularly for lower-income seniors. A Smart Growth community keeps seniors healthy and active by encouraging walking as a means of transportation, enables independence, and facilitates the engagement of residents in civic and social life.

In the past, the American Association of Retired People (AARP) has focused its advocacy...
on home modification strategies and affordable prescription drugs. Today, however, it has broadened its view and is strongly supportive of livable, walkable communities.

The AARP has developed several Livable Communities evaluation tools to help residents and local leaders identify areas of success and potential opportunities for the improvement of their own neighborhoods. The tools will also help seniors guide future growth in the rest of the community.

Elected officials would be wise to include participants representing older adults in all public planning processes, whether it be a general plan update, preparation of a specific plan or a redevelopment project. Providing these participants with copies of the AARP materials would be very helpful in bringing them up to speed in the planning issues of this century.

Both Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide and Livable and Successful Aging (a 10-point community self-assessment check-list) can be downloaded from the AARP website: www.aarp.org/research.

The City of New Westminster, British Columbia, now uses a Smart Growth Checklist for any project seeking a zoning amendment or development permit. The checklist includes important senior-friendly qualities such as public transportation, housing adaptability, accessibility and affordability, pedestrian environments and safety, and proximity to health services, shopping and parks.

**County Addresses Global Warming in General Plan:** Marin County has addressed greenhouse gas pollution in a growth plan likely to be approved this year. The County has set up standards to measure greenhouse gases and set targets for reducing them. The County also took into account possible rising sea levels as polar ice melts. It identified areas that may be flooded in the future and should not be developed. For those areas already developed but in possible danger, sea walls and levees were considered.

Among the County’s most recent on-the-ground achievements is a recently opened solar-powered, green fire station. The building features natural light and ventilation, hosts a geothermal heating and cooling system, and is constructed with green building materials. On the roof is a 38 kilowatt photovoltaic system that is expected to provide over 40% of the station’s annual electricity needs. The building will qualify for a LEED Gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

**San Jose Raises Bar for Municipal Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals:** The City of San Jose is raising the bar for reducing greenhouse gas pollution. Its targets are: 25% below 1990 levels by 2012; 35% by 2020; and 80% reduction by 2045.

This target exceeds the goal of other large cities that have set reduction goals based on a 1990 baseline. These include Los Angeles (35% by 2030), New York City (20% by 2010), San Francisco (20% by 2012), Oakland (15% by 2010), and Boston (7% or more by 2012).

The first step in measuring greenhouse gas reduction is to establish a baseline. In San Jose, this task is expected to be completed by spring 2008. It involves collecting municipal data from 1990 for electricity and other fossil fuel energy use; transportation data such as fuel consumed by the City fleet; quantities of waste generated and land filled; and other data related to sources of municipally-generated greenhouse gases.

The City already has a head start. It now has a “green” fleet of over 925 vehicles including 673 using biodiesel fuels. A modification to the wastewater treatment plant has reduced its energy consumption by about 30%. A new City Hall uses 25% less energy per square foot and a compressed natural gas (CNG) facility has been installed at the municipally-operated airport.

In 1994, San Jose was one of the first to adopt smart growth policies. Thus it has already likely reduced greenhouse gases within the city as a whole. To continue down this path, a stakeholder group is being established to create a community-wide goal for greenhouse gas emissions. It is expected that the end result will be a regional climate action plan that will incorporate the activities of residents, business and industry.

**Buildings in Chicago Turning Green:** The City of Chicago, in 1999, piloted a landscaped garden atop City Hall. The garden has been quite a success. It reduces storm-water runoff and cools the roof and air around it in hot weather.

The success of this project has led to a “green roof boom.” Today the city has more than 200 green roofs covering more than 2.5 million square feet and has begun to plan some roofs for buildings at O’Hare International Airport. The City has also adopted a green building construction code required of public projects. Developers who adhere to the standard receive speedier permit approval than those who don’t.

Following Chicago’s model, San Francisco’s Mayor Gavin Newsom has issued a directive for new municipal buildings to meet sustainable development standards. He has also directed the building department to speed the permit approval process for buildings that are environmentally friendly. Like Chicago, San Francisco has a newly-created Director of City Greening housed in Mayor Newsom’s office.

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