

Great Communities Collaborative | Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2011-2016

SUMMARY



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CONTACT

To learn more about the Great Communities Collaborative, visit www.greatcommunities.org. For a copy of the full strategic plan, please contact Heather Hood, Initiative Officer, at hmh@sff.org or 415-733-8505.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Communities Collaborative (GCC) was formed in 2006 to work towards a future where mixed-income transit-oriented communities would become prevalent in the Bay Area. The founding organizations, described as core partners, shared an awareness that the region's trend of growing by sprawling was socially and environmentally unsustainable. Currently, there are seven core partners: Greenbelt Alliance, Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, TransForm, Urban Habitat, Reconnecting America, The San Francisco Foundation, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. The East Bay Community Foundation co-envisioned and managed the GCC as a core partner for four years since the beginning. In 2010, EBCF chose to taper its role in the management and financial support of GCC. The strength of the GCC core partners is complemented by the expertise of grassroots community organizations that work within specific communities, and by technical assistance providers who create tools and provide additional expertise on issues like community health and mixed-income housing, totaling 27 organizations.

The partners share a commitment to the notion that the Bay Area's transit-rich neighborhoods should have a mix of jobs, shops, community services and amenities, as well as homes affordable to families of all income levels. We call this sustainable and equitable transit-oriented development (TOD). One key aspect of TOD is the ability for people of diverse incomes, particularly people with low incomes to reside near quality public transportation to reap the benefits of TOD, which include reduced transportation costs and improved access to jobs as well as to critical services and amenities.

VISION

The Great Communities Collaborative envisions a socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable San Francisco Bay Area where all people are able to shape the future of their communities. By working together, we can ensure that our region is made up of healthy, thriving neighborhoods that are affordable to all and well connected to regional opportunities by a premier transit network.

MISSION

The Great Communities Collaborative is a group of organizations dedicated to ensuring that the San Francisco Bay Area is made up of healthy, thriving neighborhoods that are affordable to all and linked to regional opportunities by a premier transit network. We connect local residents with the tools and resources they need to influence decision making, forge diverse partnerships to craft lasting strategies and harness the means to help move visions to reality.

Key GCC Accomplishments

The GCC has worked in over two dozen communities throughout the nine-county Bay Area and proven that when residents are involved in shaping the future of their cities, a broad range of benefits related to equity and the environment can be created. GCC accomplishments include the following:

- GCC partners have helped 25 communities work with their local governments on either drafting or completing Station Area Plans (SAPs)¹. The SAPs that resulted from the process in which the GCC was involved were passed by city councils with unprecedented degrees of density, affordable housing, community amenities such as childcare and parks, and in some cases local-hire provisions.
- As a result of the success shown in the SAP program, the agencies tripled their financial commitment from \$7 million to \$21 million for local planning in the past five years, recognizing the sites where the GCC works as examples of best practices.
- GCC envisioned and was instrumental in catalyzing an initial \$10 million grant from MTC that led to the creation of the Bay Area Transit-Oriented Housing Fund. The fund will provide low-interest loans to developers of affordable housing in strategic locations with excellent access to public transit. The fund is managed by a consortium of six Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs). They are the Low Income Investment Fund, Corporation for Supportive Housing, Enterprise Community Partners, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Northern California Community Loan Fund and Opportunity Fund. Initial investors include these six organizations, plus MTC, Citi Community Capital, Morgan Stanley, the Ford Foundation, Living Cities, and The San Francisco Foundation. The fund was launched in March 2011 and is now capitalized at \$50 million.

The Bay Area is considered a statewide and national example of good planning practice and as a place to watch for its potential for innovation. The GCC has grown, fostering change at different policy levels and generating success stories for the transit-oriented development field. Participants have shared the GCC's stories and lessons to inform partnerships around the country. But as the challenges and opportunities of our region became even clearer, we found ourselves struggling to meet our potential as a collaborative. In March 2010 the GCC decided work on a strategic plan that would better weave together its work to achieve greater regional impacts and establish a fresh governance structure to better manage information and decisions.

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

The Challenge

By the year 2035, the population of our nine-county region will rise from about 7 million today to close to 9 million. The question is not *if* the Bay Area will grow; the question is *how* will our region grow? The Bay Area is regularly listed with Los Angeles, Houston, and Atlanta as among the regions with the nation's worst traffic. Many of the region's most sensitive landscapes and best farmlands have been lost to sprawl development. Rural, suburban, and urban communities, regardless of size, need to create walkable, healthy communities in their town or city center to keep development pressure off of open space and working farms on the edge.

When there is sprawl, many people express concerns over the loss of cherished farmland and open spaces. But no one *feels* the negative impacts of sprawl like California's low-income communities and communities of color. These

¹ The Metropolitan Transportation Commission has a Station Area Planning grant program to fund city-sponsored planning efforts for the areas around future transit stations. The SAPs that are funded (a range of \$250,000–\$750,000) are intended to address the range of transit-supportive features that are necessary to support high levels of transit ridership. Usually, the GCC is working in the same places and in parallel to cities' SAP processes (up to ten each year).

populations have been largely cut off from opportunities to live in affordable, walkable and healthy communities. The region's median home price —over \$400,000— means that only about 10% of Bay Area families earn enough to afford a home. People are caught between two pressures: looking to move further away from where they live in the transit corridors and communities in the region, or fighting to be able to stay where they are.

If families with low incomes want to relocate to the suburbs they do not have the option to choose a place where affordable homes and reliable transportation coincide. It is rare that suburban places have reliable public transportation to allow for access to jobs, health care, education and other essential activities so generally people need to own a car. While owning a car can improve access for families, it increases transportation costs to an average of 29% of income for low-income families, leaving little left for healthy food, education, and savings.

Because of a growing demand by people of all incomes —especially middle and upper ones— to live in compact communities near transit, there are few communities like this left in the Bay Area that remain affordable to people with low incomes. The ones that do remain are vulnerable to becoming completely unaffordable, so they must be planned for a mix of income levels, especially low income. Meanwhile, the increasing attractiveness of places near transit, even before planning processes and public improvements begin, increases land values and prices people out. Now where should they go?

Our Opportunity

There is fertile ground for nurturing a new model for how our region can grow that enables residents to turn their cities into truly great communities – walkable, mixed-income neighborhoods with affordable homes near transit, jobs, and services.

- There is market demand. Consistent with the “rebirth of the city” phenomenon that is sweeping similar strong-market regions throughout the nation, about one-third of housing demand in the Bay Area is for homes in urban-style neighborhoods where walking is a viable option and accessing transit is easy.
- There is public will. Of the \$16 billion Bay Area voters approved for transportation infrastructure since 2000, \$12 billion is dedicated to improving and expanding public transit instead of building more sprawl-inducing roads and highways. People are choosing to ride the rails rather than sit in traffic.
- There is regional and local government leadership. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) established a first-in-the-nation policy requiring local governments to plan for minimum levels of housing near new transit stations. MTC is providing funding to select communities for the planning of these station areas, and many city councils in the region have adopted inclusionary zoning policies to ensure new affordable homes are built.
- There is nonprofit leadership. High functioning regional nonprofits and foundations are raising the bar for what the sectors can do together to achieve triple bottom lines for equity, the environment and the economy through progressive planning and development practices.
- There is action at the state level. California adopted landmark global warming legislation, including the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32) and Senate Bill 375 (Steinberg), which requires the state to set greenhouse gas reduction targets for each region and that each also adopt a “Sustainable Communities Strategy” (SCS) or an “Alternative Planning Strategy” (APS) that will be a plan for reach the targets. The SCS must be an integrated transportation and land use plan that will meet the region's greenhouse gas reduction targets and provide homes for all participants in the region's economy.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

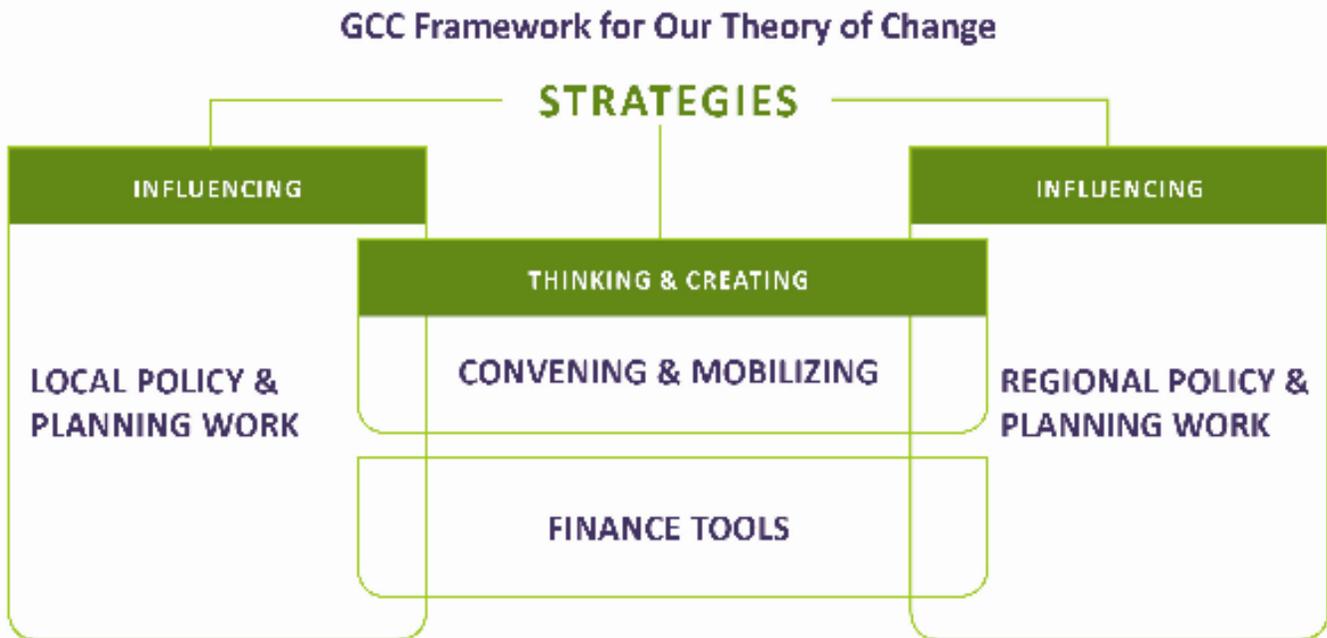
The strategic planning process utilized an inclusive approach, involving the core partners plus a broader community of stakeholders. The key components were stakeholder input obtained through interviews and surveys, intensive involvement of the core partners through participation in retreats and multiple task forces, and a shared commitment to consensus-based decision making. The process began in August 2010 and concluded in April 2011. It was designed and facilitated by Teamworks, a San Francisco-based firm.

The following were the overall goals of the strategic planning process:

1. Develop clarity around the extent and limits of GCC's existing mission, and refine the mission if necessary.
2. Identify GCC's strategies and priorities for the next 5-10 years.
3. Revise our governance structure and decision making processes.
4. Develop a partnering, staffing, and resource plan for achieving the strategies and priorities.

THEORY OF CHANGE — GOALS/STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

A theory of change (TOC) was developed to articulate what it will take to achieve the GCC's vision and mission. The TOC contains four elements: Local Policy and Planning, Regional Policy and Planning, Convening and Mobilizing, and Finance Tools. Each element includes a specific goal as well as a set of strategies and key activities to guide GCC's work in this area. Detail on the activities for each strategy can be found in the full strategic planning document, available upon request.



Local Policy and Planning

GCC drew upon its five years of experience in local policy and planning to develop the following goal:

The Bay Area grows so that most people have the opportunity to live within a half mile of a transit station or major bus corridor. We want to ensure that the growth of new and existing transit-

oriented developments improve the quality of life of residents by providing affordable housing; improving access for people of all incomes to amenities, services, and jobs; and by working to protect the option of existing resident to be able to choose to remain in the community. The ultimate goal of promoting TOD as a strategy for accommodating growth is to increase transit use, reduce driving and reduce pressure to develop open space.

The principle of engagement with the local community remains an essential part of this work, and the strategies described below are refined to ensure better use of the resources that the collaborative can bring to a community.

Local Policy and Planning: Strategies and Activities

1. Continue efforts to create, influence, enhance and adopt local level station area/corridor plans.
2. Influence and inform implementation of select local level plans by engaging in adoption/amendment of local level policies. Local teams will assess local policies that need changing.
3. Support specific development proposals.
4. Monitor sites where the GCC is working, and provide ongoing technical assistance and support to community-based groups to ensure local support for sustainable and equitable TOD.
5. Identify and support a locally-focused entity that will hold, defend and implement the vision of each local plan we help pass.
6. Catalyze inclusive local planning processes and decision making.



How we will measure our success in local policy and planning?

- Existing and new community residents' access to the benefits of sustainable and equitable TOD is significantly improved as a result of wins from station area/corridor plans.
- Cities adopt policies that support GCC regional goals for sustainable and equitable TOD.
- Specific development proposals with sustainable and equitable TOD elements that align with GCC's goals are approved.
- Local and regional allies working on pivotal campaigns, projects and plans around the region have the technical capacity to support sustainable and equitable TOD.
- Local stakeholders ensure true implementation of previously approved plans.
- Local and regional allies influence the planning and decision-making processes.

Regional Policy and Planning

The GCC will shape regional-level policies, plans, and funding priorities, while also and influencing state and federal decisions that impact TOD at the regional and local level. For GCC's Regional Policy and Planning work, the following goal was developed:

Maximize the ability to plan for and implement sustainable and equitable transit-oriented development in communities in the nine-county Bay Area by shaping regional-level policies, plans, and funding priorities and influencing state and federal decisions that impact TOD at the regional and local level.

Regional Policy and Planning: Strategies and Activities

1. Build and inform the field of advocacy stakeholders working on regional issues that affect the region’s ability to plan for and implement sustainable and equitable TOD in the Bay Area.
2. Coordinate action and foster linkages among groups conducting advocacy on state/federal issues that impact the ability to plan for and implement sustainable and equitable TOD in the Bay Area.
3. Catalyze priority collaborative activities that address key Bay Area issues related to planning for and implementing sustainable and equitable TOD.



How we will measure our successes with regional policy and planning?

- Opportunities to advance sustainable and equitable TOD among regional players (Association of Bay Area Governments, MTC, etc.) are collectively identified by GCC and its partners. Information about these opportunities is optimally shared by and among GCC and its partners to support strategy development.
- Opportunities to strategically advance sustainable and equitable TOD in the Bay Area, particularly through federal and state legislation and regulation, are collectively identified by GCC and its partners. Information about these opportunities is optimally shared by and among GCC and its partners to support strategy development.
- Collaborative campaigns are catalyzed and incubated by GCC that capitalize on opportunities identified and pursued by GCC and its partners.

Convening and Mobilizing

The goal for Convening and Mobilizing is the following:

To build the field of equitable and sustainable TOD in the region; establish a comfortable “zone” for all kinds of stakeholders in the field to come together to connect, ask good questions and expand their expertise, and catalyze activities between the scales of work.

Convening and Mobilizing: Strategies and Activities

1. Serve as a convener to surface and discuss sustainable and equitable TOD issues among key stakeholders around the region.
2. Commission select, actionable research about equitable and sustainable TOD when there is a specific need that is not being pursued anywhere else.



How we will measure our successes with convening and mobilizing?

- The base of support for sustainable and equitable TOD throughout the region among a broad range of stakeholders is strengthened by bringing them together in ways that complement GCC's other strategies.
- Research commissioned by GCC results in the development of practical reports and tools that are commonly used by advocates and supporters of sustainable and equitable TOD as well as community members more generally.

Finance Tools

The goal of this area of work is the following:

Increase the flow of and focus existing public and private funding in the Bay Area to support transit-oriented development and TOD-supportive infrastructure.

The strategies aim to create two types of tools: one to expand funding, and the other to improve the focus of existing funding. For all of these activities, we will consistently scan the region to align our efforts where feasible and to avoid duplication.

Finance Tools: Strategies and Activities

1. Pursue select public and private funding initiatives to support the planning and implementation of equitable and sustainable and TOD-supportive infrastructure.
2. Engage in shaping and execution of the TOD Fund.



How we will measure our success in developing finance tools?

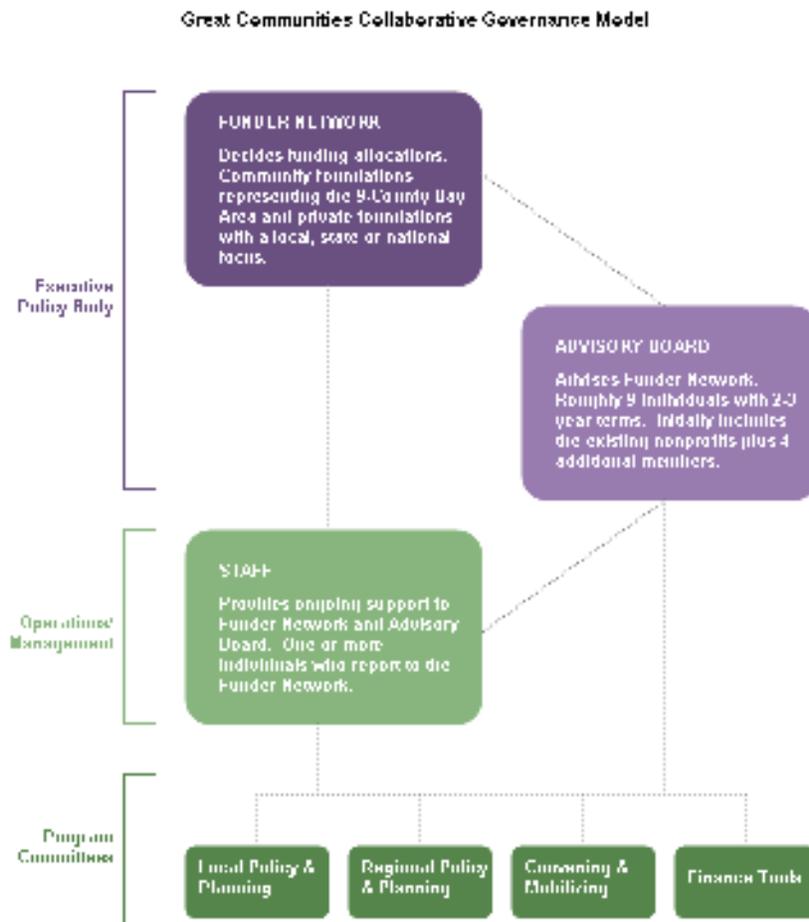
- Public and private funding supporting the planning and implementation of sustainable and equitable TOD is increased and directed in ways that align with GCC's goals.
- The TOD Fund provides (and leverages) capital to plan and implement specific projects that exemplify sustainable and equitable TOD.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

We developed a model for governance and management based on values we believe will contribute to an effective partnership. We value being strategic, independent, nimble, transparent, accountable and manageable. We drew upon our experience and best practices of collaborations around the country to guide our thinking. We included the following best practices in this model:

- Board members are individuals representing organizations and serve for defined (and potentially renewable) terms.
- The structure for decision-making prevents or minimizes conflicts of interest.
- There is clarity on who has the authority to make what decisions.
- There are transparent and deliberate pathways of communication for decision-making to all stakeholders.
- There are independent staff.
- There is a clear record of decisions and a high bar set to reopen past decisions.

The chart that follows outlines the relationships between the different governance bodies.



A CHECKLIST OF NEXT STEPS TO TRANSITION FROM THE CURRENT TO THE NEW PROGRAM AND STRUCTURE

- ✓ Establish a transition team to carry out the transition
- ✓ Develop and implement transition plan
- ✓ Detail the governance model and hire staff
- ✓ Create and implement communications strategy (for strategic plan and overall for GCC)
- ✓ Develop detailed work plans
- ✓ Develop detailed budgets
- ✓ Develop and execute a plan for organizational culture
- ✓ Fundraise to support the workplan
- ✓ Monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and make mid-course adjustments accordingly

SUMMARY

The GCC envisions through the execution of this strategic plan it will make measurable gains toward an economically and environmentally sustainable San Francisco Bay Area reflective of its diversity.

