

SANTA MONICA A DECADE LATER: URBAN PROGRESSIVES IN OFFICE

Key characteristics of a "healthy community" are the availability of decent, affordable housing, the maintenance of a "human-scale" urban environment, and freedom for all members to participate meaningfully in community life. Ten years after launching its urban progressive experiment, Santa Monica, California has made substantial progress toward these goals.

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In the spring of 1981, the city of Santa Monica, California, made national and international headlines when a progressive, pro-tenant coalition, Santa Monicans for Renters Rights (SMRR), gained majority control over the city government. SMRR consisted of low- and moderate-income residents, the kinds of people who had never before been elected to city office in Santa Monica or elsewhere, and who had not been recruited from traditional urban elites. Com-

mitted to the democratization of urban decision-making and redistributive planning policies, the coalition allowed Santa Monica to break away from the traditional urban script followed by most U.S. cities, which relies on a free market growth model. Grass-roots support enabled the coalition to redefine and redirect the urban agenda away from the traditional exchange-value and "commodity" emphasis toward use values and "community" priorities. SMRR sup-

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porters—originally energized by tenants' rights issues in 1979—now had high hopes for the candidates they elected and for the democratization of city politics. Popular support for the coalition was evidenced by the fact that over 6,000 of Santa Monica's 90,000 residents actively participated

in election work through such activities as telephone banking, door-to-door canvassing, and community meetings.¹

Now, for over ten years, progressives have been elected to the city council in Santa Monica. Between 1981 and 1984, and 1988 and 1992, they held a voting majority. At other times (1979 to 1981 and 1984 to 1988) they were in the minority. In both 1988 and 1990, progressives symbolically continued their commitment to expanding the electoral choices of the traditionally disempowered, by fielding and electing to the city council the following candidates: Judy Abdo, a lesbian activist; Dennis Zane, a high-school math teacher; Tony Vasquez, a Hispanic candidate; Kelly Olsen, a taxi cab driver; and Ken Genser, a disabled activist.

From the vantage point of ten years' experience, it is possible to measure some of the actual consequences of progressive policies as well as the extent to which a progressive agenda has made Santa Monica a different kind of urban place. SMRR candidates won the right to pass laws affecting the city, appoint people to influential positions in city office, and exercise discretion over city funds. While

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tenants' rights and rent control formed their initial and most influential platform, Santa Monica's progressives had a broader urban program—partly constructed through national networking—to propose when voters became disillusioned with free market solutions.

Where did they create new frontiers, and what were the limits they encountered in the attempt to alter the urban space and political culture of Santa Monica? The Santa Monica case may provide a new answer to R.E. Pahl's question, "Whose City?"²

It is useful to point out that the modern progressive movement, as it emerged in Santa Monica, functioned at different levels of meaning depending on the various activist networks involved. For CED (Campaign for Economic Democracy), the situation in Santa Monica meant a step toward "economic democracy"; for a network of urban progressives, it meant control of development and land-based assets to capture returns for the city locally and promote a human-scale, participatory environment; for neighborhood activists, it meant community-based control through participation in decision making; and for those focused on housing or senior issues, it meant a struggle to keep their own living space affordable. There were differences of opinion about the extent to which the movement was expected to be "transformative." Some activists felt that the public could be converted into supporters of progressive

options through education and experience. Others felt this was a utopian goal, and that within the limits of a reformist movement, the best alternative was to rely on a structural solution: making a rent-control law, broad-based participation, and/or land-use and development rules an institutional part of the city's governance structure. After the 1981 election, the pragmatist strand of the movement came to the fore.

Since then, Santa Monica's progressive program has been analyzed at various stages by a number of sources and from a variety of perspectives.³ Our intent here is not to present a complete overview, but rather to focus on housing policy, a principal element in the urban progressive agenda. We emphasize some selected areas which should act as touchstones, or "barometers," for any progressive housing program. Among these are rent control, development agreements and minority housing programs.

Rent Control

Rent control was the key issue which had the strongest support among voters in Santa Monica. The law is less negotiable than any other aspect of city politics because tenant organizers presented it as a city charter amendment on the 1979 ballot. It continues to be administered by a tenant-elected rent-control board. In a

number of cities, rent-control laws have been undermined by city appointees hostile to rent boards; in Santa Monica, through national networking, activists knew this, and created a different structure. Therefore, it is no accident that the law is unusually strong; it was designed to circumvent the problems experienced by tenants in other cities with more moderate rent-control laws.

The provisions of the 1979 law were quite strident; the law appeared to be written with almost complete distrust of landlords. The rent-control board has been funded through annual registration fees paid by tenants in their rent. Landlords

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were required to report vacancies for inclusion on a list which the rent-control board would make available to the public. Security deposits to landlords were to be placed in an interest-bearing account out of which landlords would offset operating costs. Also incorporated into the law was a "just cause" eviction clause, treble damages to be awarded for rent overcharges, and rent decreases in the case of improper maintenance. Rents were affixed to the unit, rather than the tenant, meaning that no "vacancy decontrol" of rents would be permis-

sible with the departure of a tenant. All new rental housing construction, along with houses and duplexes, were ex-

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empted from the law.

One of the most controversial portions of the rent-control law stated that while landlords had to be guaranteed a fair return, no increase would be authorized merely because a landlord had a negative cash flow as a result of refinancing, provided the landlord could have reasonably foreseen a negative cash flow based on the rent schedule then in effect. In an effort to remove buildings from the speculative cycle, the rent-increase formula was based on "historic investment," that is, the amount of money actually paid for a piece of property, rather than currently, "debt service" was not taken into account in rent increases. The reasoning for this was based on a number of studies that found that while about 50 percent of the rent dollar goes into debt service, many buildings were purchased at fixed rate mortgages—effectively exempting mortgage payments from consumer price increases.⁴ To peg rent increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), as landlord groups wished, would be to reward landlords with double the amount of their operating expenses.

Challenges to the law. While Santa Monica's strong rent-control policy has generally remained intact despite numerous challenges in the courts,⁵ landlords have attempted to circumvent

the law by passing preemptive state legislation that takes the teeth out of local rent control. In general, the bills seek to turn strong rent-control legislation into moderate rent-control laws. Moderate rent-control laws are characterized by vacancy de-control, higher allowable rent increases, and weak administration. Most studies indicate that these kinds of laws have very little impact on overall rent levels.⁶

With one major exception, these challenges have been unsuccessful, thanks to the persistent efforts of State Senator David Roberti who, as leader of the California Senate, has caused most of these bills to die before they reach a vote of the full Senate. It is generally acknowledged that these anti-rent control bills have the support of the majority of senators, legislators and current Republican Governor Pete Wilson. Should Senator David Roberti lose his position as leader of the Senate, the future of Santa Monica's tough rent-control law would be in jeopardy. One bill that did clear the Senate, and was signed by the Governor, was the Ellis

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Bill, which allows landlords to remove their buildings from the rental housing market and replace them with condominiums. This is one way for landlords to elude regulation. As a result, by the end of 1990, Santa Monica city officials estimated that over 1,000 apartment units

had been taken off the market.

In 1989 the rapid loss of apartment units due to the Ellis Bill alarmed SMRR, the city council and the rent-control board. By the winter of 1990 an average of 12 units a week were being lost. Most of the apartment units taken off the market had rents under \$500, and were being replaced by posh \$400,000 condominiums. The response to the Ellis Bill came in several local government actions to encourage landlords to stay in business. In the fall of 1989, the rent-control board passed an "inclusionary housing plan" that would allow rents in vacated units to rise to

market levels with a ceiling ranging between \$400 and \$900. This allowance was contingent on the landlord's providing evidence of another unit in the building with a very low-income person residing at a fixed rent, ranging from \$266 for a studio apartment to \$361 for a two-bedroom apartment. Following this, the rent board granted a six percent allowable increase and a simplified cost pass-through system. In November of 1990, SMRR sponsored and passed an initiative requiring that 30 percent of all multi-family residential housing newly constructed must be affordable and occupied by low- and moderate-income persons. These measures were designed to subvert the state-sponsored Ellis Bill which has challenged Santa Monica's

strong rent-control law. The November 1990 SMRR initiative has resulted in a significant drop in the number of apartment units being taken off the market. It should be noted that it is not strong local rent control that caused the dramatic loss of affordable housing units, as some conservative critics have argued, but the intervention of the state legislature. If the Ellis Bill had been defeated in the state legislature, Santa Monica would not have lost 1,000 affordable units.

In contemplating the role of the state, the lesson for progressives resides in how an urban grass-roots movement

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can be circumvented by forces outside the city limits.⁷ The state legislature has been a major foe of strong local rent controls and other progressive legislation that places restrictions on the rights of property owners. Quick thinking at the local level, however, can preserve housing gains, as occurred in Santa Monica.

The redistributive impact of rent control: Who benefits? A major question regarding the goals of the urban progressive movement in Santa Monica con-

cerns the economic redistributive impacts of Santa Monica's rent-control law. The question is important: What can tenants gain in real dollars by participating in an urban grass-roots movement?

Santa Monica's strong rent-control law resulted in substantial income redis-

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tribution between landlords and tenants. Strong rent controls permit no vacancy de-control (increase of rents when tenants move out of a controlled apartment), are administered by elected rather than appointed boards, and use rent-increase formulas based in part on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or Net Operating Income (NOI). Moderate

rent controls have some vacancy de-control provisions, are administered by appointed boards, and use rent-increase formulas of full CPI, with provisions for hardship appeals. A 1986 study compared a ten-year forecast of rents and affordability under certain cities' current strong rent-control laws with the probable results of more moderate ordinances that would have permitted vacated units to be temporarily decontrolled. That study estimated that under Santa Monica's strong rent-control law, average monthly rents would increase from \$458 to \$631—a ten-year increase of 37 percent. On the other hand, under a vacancy de-control provision, average rents would rise to about \$1,123—an increase of 145 percent, as landlords take advantage of tenant turnover to raise rents on vacated units to market levels—a difference of 78 percent.⁸

Using current government standards of a household paying no more than 30 percent of its income into housing, the study further found that in 1986, 48 percent of the rental units were

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unaffordable, and predicted that by 1997 that proportion would fall to 29 percent. If the law were changed to a moderate rent-control ordinance with a vacancy de-control provision, the number of unaffordable units would increase to 55 percent by 1997. Santa Monica's strong rent-control law could lead to the creation of 6,000 ad-

ditional affordable units—significant when one considers that this represents almost 20 percent of the total rental housing stock. Santa Monica tenants, under a strong rent-control ordinance, will save a cumulative total of \$1.1 billion dollars between 1987 and 1997.⁹

To answer the question "who benefits?" then, the evidence points to low- and moderate-income tenants, and to the fact that urban space is made more accessible to mixed-income groups as a result of strong rent controls. While 1,000 units have been taken off the market due to state legislation, 6,000 units will have become affordable by 1997 because of rent control.¹⁰

Homeownership programs. The lack of interest on the part of tenants in becoming homeowners is a by-product of the strong rent-control law. Attempts to convince tenants to convert their apartments to limited equity cooperatives have been unsuccessful. Because rents are dramatically lower under Santa Monica's rent-control law, the cost of cooperative ownership—at least for the short term—

would be significantly higher. While the city's nonprofit housing-development corporation has built and rehabilitated hundreds of rental units, no limited equity cooperatives have been produced. One study estimated that a conversion from a rental to a cooperative dwelling would result in mortgage payments \$65 per month higher. Although Santa Monica's nonprofit housing corporation is technically capable of producing cooperatives, it sees no tenant "demand" for this kind of housing. The rather uncertain gamble that tenants are making is that Santa Monica's law will remain strong in the future.

Land Use and Development
Before SMRR

progressives were elected to the city council in 1981, there was a general fear in the city that real estate developers would transform Santa Monica into a city of high-rise buildings and high-income residents: a Miami Beach of the West Coast. Evidence included investor Lawrence Welk's 11-story building near the oceanfront, plans to construct the "largest condominium development in California," and a history of redevelopment plans that targeted low-income communities.¹¹ Surrounding communities just outside the boundaries of Santa Monica were already full of high-rise buildings. Although negative public sentiments in the early 1970s resulted in down-zoning and swept in a more mod-

erate city council, this was not enough to prevent large developers from targeting Santa Monica, whose oceanfront location was highly desirable. Exercising local control over development was an idea shared by progressives and a majority of the population.

Dealing with growth and development in a progressive manner became a major preoccupation of SMRR city council members. One observer, in his assessment of the Santa Monica experiment, concluded that "planning, not El Salvador or the nuclear freeze, was the centerpiece of their 'progressive' administration."¹² In

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particular, progressives wanted to preserve "community" at the expense of "commodity," challenging the traditional urban script that automatically gives developers broad leverage.¹³ One of their first actions upon achieving office was to institute a six-month moratorium on all construction in the city. They did this in order to stop the development process while buying time to institute a progressive

agenda that would resolve questions of growth, land-use and zoning. Their move was met with outrage by the business community, which argued that this was an unacceptable interference with private property rights. Not all projects were stopped "cold" by the moratorium, however. Some developers had viable "vested interest" arguments that could

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have withstood a legal test. To resolve this quandary, the city council used the concept of the negotiated "developer agreement," a solution that brought widespread notoriety as well as positive attention to Santa Monica.

Development agreements were not by themselves a new idea. They put into practice the concept of a "public balance sheet,"¹⁴ whereby it is assumed that since developers impose significant costs on communities by using municipal resources, demanding subsidies, or creating social problems, they should give something back to the community in exchange for their right to build and make money. Traditionally, city officials have encouraged growth, arguing that as the pie gets bigger, everyone gets a bigger slice. The "pie" is often presented as consisting of new jobs, higher land values, an increase in tax revenues, and greater consumer spending. However, growth is frequently accompanied by problems such as higher housing costs, a rise in crime, more pollution, and traffic congestion.¹⁵ Because these costs are frequently invisible to the public, the "public balance sheet" strategy is used to make the costs visible so that corporations and businesses can provide trade-offs to the community to make up for the stress that they are placing on it. For progressives, the task is to minimize negative aspects of development and maximize those that are positive.

Trade-offs with de-

velopers were put into practice with much less controversy in cities such as San Francisco and Boston. In Santa Monica, however, the controversy resided in two features. First, instead of asking for fees, the progressives asked for "social goods" that would benefit low- and moderate-income residents rather than traditional elites. Second, during the six-month moratorium, there were no fixed rules for negotiation of such agreements. Negotiations were a way for developers to resolve their situations out of court, and for SMRR, a way to push agreements in a progressive direction. However, each situation was handled on a case-by-case basis. Progressives knew they had unusual leverage due to Santa Monica's attractive and desirable location, but even they did not know in advance what the limits of the bargaining process would be. As they groped to find what was socially possible under the circumstances, they faced a great deal of hostility. Their agenda represented a complete break with existing rules and expectations in the community, and the resulting tension was enormous. A developer interviewed on the television news magazine *60 Minutes*

referred to the situation as "legalized extortion."

Moreover, some progressive neighborhood activists themselves criticized the process, since SMRR council members and then-city manager John Alshuler went behind closed doors to negotiate instead of getting genuine participation from

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the neighborhoods to be affected.

Development agreements have been around in Santa Monica for nearly a decade. As such, it is possible to look beyond the emotional rhetoric that surfaced in the early 1980s and to carefully assess results. Furthermore, the "free form" negotiation of agreements no longer exists. With approval of the City's "Land Use Element" in the fall of 1984, the guidelines for such agreements were formalized, except in the cases of very large or complex projects. The document institutionalized some progressive principles while bowing to some pressures from traditional elites. The final product was modified by prominent participation of the Commercial and Industrial Property Association (CIPA), which attacked the original version as "no growth." Hiring a consultant, they involved themselves deeply in the revision process. The end result gained a favorable reaction from business leaders, healing a two-year-old rift over the document. Like the rent-control law, the city's "Land Use Element" is both a formal document

and the embodiment of a social process emerging between various groups over time. Below, we will briefly examine the features of the development agreements.

Development agreements. Santa Monica's best-known development agreement, in part because it was publi-

cized by *60 Minutes*, was the Welton Becket agreement. The Colorado Place development was projected to be a massive \$150 million project. With office condominiums, retail functions, and a hotel, it was intended to serve as the international headquarters of Welton Becket, a major architectural firm. While it had secured preliminary approvals, the project was stopped by the six-month moratorium after an unsuccessful appeal for exemption. It was further halted by the negotiation process with the city, adding up to a delay of about one year.

For progressives, the challenge was to transform a huge office complex into something that socially served all elements of the community. As a result, they bargained for 150 units of affordable housing, a 150,000 square foot public park, a 2,000 square foot daycare center with improvements including play equipment and furnishings, affirmative action hiring, an accessibility plan for the disabled, and an arts and social services fee for the city.

The Welton Becket agreement became a benchmark for future development projects. Progressives were willing to support office and commercial developments only if they complied with the following conditions:

1. A 1.5 percent arts and social service fee based on the total cost of the

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development;

2. One housing unit for every 5,000 square feet of floor area for any development of 7,500 square feet or more;

3. Encouragement of the use of public transportation, bikes and walking for every development of 20,000 square feet or more;

4. An affordable daycare center for all developments with at least 40,000 square feet;

5. Provision of parks for developments of 70,000 square feet or more; and

6. Agreement that developments should not exceed six stories and should be mixed-use, containing community enterprises on the first floor (bookstores, restaurants), offices on the middle floors, and housing on the top floors.

Several other projects resulted in developers' making substantial concessions to the city. The Greenwood Center office complex was a five-story development undertaken in part by a subsidiary of the Campeau Corporation of Canada. It has 20 units of affordable housing off-site, as well as some minimal park and daycare space. Another project was altered by a development agreement into a slightly less dense neighborhood/commercial-and-office project than originally projected. A cash-in-lieu-of-performance payment, based on the approved formula in the new Land Use Element, was accepted as a substitute for housing. Addi-

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tionally, an unusually large and bulky condominium development was scaled-down and includes provisions for six to eight affordable units off-site.

The most successful, even if controversial, "give-back" negotiated by the progressives involves a \$300 million, 1.26 million square foot development called the Water Garden. According to an agreement made on March 23, 1988, this development is being built on a 17-acre site around a two-acre pond. Over 65 percent

of the acreage will be landscaped to provide a park-like atmosphere. The buildings will be human-scale (six floors) with a pedestrian orientation featuring atria, courtyards, restaurants, and a health club. The project will have a 3,500 square foot daycare center and elevators to 2-1/2 levels of underground parking. More importantly, progressives were able to get the developers to donate \$7.2 million toward improving low-income housing and parks, \$300,000 for a homeless shelter and \$150,000 for a citywide arts program. Developers expect the project to generate \$1.2 million in annual revenue and 5,000 jobs. Consequently, they are paying a \$6.5 million traffic-improvement fee.

An overview of these projects reveals several issues. First, as far as housing is concerned, due to the scale of the construction, the proportion of affordable

housing obtained is small relative to the city's shortage. The largest batch of housing obtained was the initial 150 units through Welton Becket. Without progressives in office, however, no housing would have been created at all, since this is not part of the institutionalized dialogue between cities and developers. Demands for social "give-backs" ask developers, as significant urban actors, to recognize the needs of the community, including those of lower-income residents. In principle, this is a broadening of public discourse to embrace non-elite priorities in the city. At the same time, visionary goals are always constrained by existing limits. Santa Monica's experience illustrates both the visions and the constraints in a manner that offers lessons for other cities.

Community development.

The development agreements did leave behind a legacy of social concerns. Before progressives took over, community development programs were aimed at middle-and-upper income neighborhoods. The most infamous example was the use of CDBG funds, obtained for Santa Monica's lower-income Pico neighborhood, to fund one of the old city council's pet projects, a flashy new mall a block from the ocean. Elites traditionally viewed community development as a "gimmick" to provide tax breaks for a firm, free land for a corporate relocation, employee training

programs, and recreational opportunities for the well-to-do. Progressives challenged these priorities. They attempted to involve ordinary citizens in agenda setting and decisions about how money would be spent to benefit low- and moderate-income people. Attractive and citizen-friendly packages were put together to promote outreach, and the city council provided seed money for neighborhood organizations.

Likewise, Santa Monica's Community Development program was aimed at meeting the needs of low- and moderate-income citizens. This program was drawn

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up into two major parts: community/neighborhood improvements and community-service projects. Community/neighborhood projects were aimed at the following beneficiaries for 1988-89:

1. Community Corporation of Santa Monica — \$270,000 to support a local non-profit corporation for the development of low and moderate income

housing.

2. Pico Neighborhood Housing Trust — \$576,000 for the purchase and renovation of low- and moderate-income housing in Santa Monica's largest minority neighborhood.

Community service projects were of the following type for 1988-89:

1. Latino Resource Organization — \$106,625 to provide public awareness

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activities for Latino residents.

2. Adapt — \$33,514 to assist disabled persons with employment and training.

3. Low-Income and Elderly United/Community Action Project — \$105,625 for advocacy and assistance to low-income persons.

When Congress set up the Community Development program, the intent was to serve low- and moderate-income persons. Yet without effective grassroots strength these funds are often poorly targeted and fail to meet the needs of the poor. The progressive movement in Santa Monica mobilized the less advantaged population and raised their entitlement in the city. This continued to be the case even when SMRR candidates temporarily lost their voting majority. *Capitol of "Hip"?*

Twenty years ago Santa Monica was known as the headquarter's for the RAND Corporation. Today, the city of eight square miles is "fast becoming the world center of the contemporary arts movement."¹⁶ *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, in a cover story, declared Santa Monica the "capitol of hip." The progressives actively support local artists with several unique initiatives. First, an arts fee for big developments is used to buy public art, some of which comes from local artists. Public art works in the form of murals and sculpture are placed throughout the city. Secondly,

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progressives have been responsible for passing a unique zoning ordinance which allows artists to live anywhere in the city where they are producing art. Santa Monica has 90 public and private art galleries, more than most major cities in America. At least ten of these galleries are consid-

ered "cutting edge" by art experts. World-class artists such as Laddie John Dill, Ed Ruscha and Robert Graham work in Santa Monica.

While during the 1980s Westwood, next to UCLA, was "the place to be" on a weekend night for the young and fashionable, Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade has become, according to *Travel and Leisure* magazine, "one of Southern California's best street scenes." On weekends, the Promenade is packed with people. The progressives were instrumental in turning around this outdoor shopping area, which a few years earlier was better known for its preponderance of discount "going out of business" stores, boarded-up and decaying buildings, and its population of winos, drug users and toughs.

The progressives put together a plan to revitalize the Third Street Promenade. Inspired by the work of Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford, "human-scale" design was used to reinvigorate the Third Street Promenade. They changed the zoning ordinances and encouraged mixed-use development which brought in apartments and condos on top of busi-

hired to touch up, redesign and create more colorful building façades. The street was enlivened by murals, carts selling food and merchandise, numerous islands of fountains, and flower beds and sculpture with benches wrapped around them. Street musicians, poets, magicians, and mimes were encouraged to ply their trade on the Promenade. Critical to the success of the Promenade was the attraction of two major cinema chains operating 19 screens, along with six independent bookstores. A plethora of independently owned restaurants from cheap to expensive, exotic to mundane, line the Promenade with much of the seating out on the widened sidewalks. Like Paris, it is a place to stroll and sit, eat and drink, watch and be watched. Moreover, the huge success of the Third Street Promenade has prompted revitalization and upgrading in surrounding business and commercial areas.

Housing Programs for Minority Neighborhoods

Although certain other issues such as jobs and youth programs have been raised, the primary preoccupation of minorities in Santa Monica has been housing, and in some instances, neighborhood development. Many pressures have been placed on the Pico neighborhood, a predominantly minority area, leading to a decreased stock of affordable housing. First, the neighborhood was

bisected by the Santa Monica Freeway. Revitalization projects and "spot zoning" then permitted the replacement of single-family residential areas with manufacturing, industrial and multi-family zones.

As a response to the housing crisis, rent control has always been a mixed blessing for lower-income communities, a fact that helps to explain the ambiguous electoral support that SMRR has received in Pico. While rents are regulated, many are already too high for the income structure of the poorest sections. Furthermore, Pico residents generally tolerate more deteriorated housing conditions; a common fear — frequently realized — is that landlords will curtail what little maintenance they are already doing if controls are insti-

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tuted. Meanwhile, studies suggest that landlords use the annual adjustments built into rent-control laws to raise rents regularly, regardless of market conditions (i.e., operating expenses).¹⁷

Since residents were already being driven out by the "free market" rents in Santa Monica, for the most part rent controls froze the situation as it was in 1978. However, even rent-control advocates know that it is only a holding measure. Unless accompanied by a more comprehensive housing program, it will only slow the exodus of Pico's more marginal residents. A 1987 study examining the impacts of rent control over a seven-year period in Santa Monica re-

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seven-year period in Santa Monica reported that rents had fallen relative to non-controlled areas and that class composition of renters had remained the same.¹⁸ Observing that the proportion of low-income to moderate-income renters had remained the same, the study concluded that the phenomenon of gentrification had been halted in Santa Monica. However, the percentage of black renters has, in fact, fallen from 5 percent to 3 percent, and among Latinos from 18 percent to 13 percent. These declines in the black and Latino renter populations have been attributed not to rent control but to other factors related to declining fertility levels among both groups and African-Americans' declining incomes.

Disabled rights and accessibility.

An important area of minority rights where progressives have made a lasting mark is that of accessibility for the disabled. Led by SMRR city council member Dolores Press, progressives have transformed Santa Monica into the most accessible city in the nation. Through intelligent and far-sighted planning, they put together an array of programs that allow disabled persons to move freely, independently, conveniently, and safely within the city. In 1982, Santa Monica's urban progressives established an Office for the Disabled which serves an important advocacy role and coordinates a range of programs. The city of Santa Monica has developed a path-breaking

"Home Access Program" which provides the free installation of grab bars, hand rails, bathroom safety equipment, audible and visual alarms, lowered thresholds, and wood entry ramps in the home of any disabled low- or moderate-income person. In terms of transportation access, every street in Santa Monica contains a parallel sidewalk with curbs cut for wheelchair users. The city even installed a sidewalk that runs from the street down to the beach, allowing wheelchair users to touch the ocean water. This sidewalk is an important environmental gesture, symbolizing Santa Monica's commitment to persons with disabilities.

While none of Santa Monica's regularly scheduled buses were wheelchair accessible during the 1970s, 100 percent of the municipal bus fleet is now equipped with wheelchair lifts. In addition to this program, Santa Monica has also put together a door-to-door transportation service for elderly and disabled persons. Disabled and elderly are taken from their homes directly to any other address in Santa Monica. Santa Monica's Office for the Disabled provides additional services, including an architectural

barrier removal program, library services, recreational opportunities, employment programs, and community service opportunities.

Conclusion

The elements of Santa Monica's housing policy discussed above indicate an important symbolic and actual commitment to em-

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powering traditionally disenfranchised members of urban communities. This has always been an important goal for urban progressives. In Santa Monica, the first progressive administration set the tone for these commitments and institutionalized them. The city now has a stated commitment to social equity and tolerance of minority viewpoints. Thus the search for an appropriate definition of community fairness continues to thrive.

The evolution of a tenant-rights movement into a more general progressive urban movement provides an opportunity to evaluate structural constraints and opportunities for social change in the United States. In Santa Monica, electing progressives to public office permitted an exploration of the potential of municipal government and the tools of urban planning — when influenced by a very different set of people — to reshape urban space and social relations within that space. We found that major gains can be made in the areas of housing, urban design and service delivery to the disadvantaged. Grass-roots organizations were able to work toward a definition of urban space as “community” rather than “commodity.”

In terms of physical space, Santa

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Monica's progressives have maintained a reduced-scale, low-density environment. The city has a different face as a result, free of many common urban blights such as pollution and lack of green space. Regional and long-term trends, however, continue to operate on the city. The “Land Use Element,” a product of political compromise, retains a progressive character, but job displacements grow side by side with some of the new revenue priorities of the city. This remains a challenge to any progressive agenda. In the area of economic relationships within the city, the progressive administration acquired concessions from developers that never would have made

their way into the city's public dialogue under a different group. Many of these were oriented away from traditional elites and toward the less privileged neighborhoods of the city, which were thus rendered socially and politically visible.

While Santa Monica's rent-control law has contributed significantly to housing affordability in the city, it needs to be supplemented with broader policies encouraging homeownership. There is also a danger of over-reliance on the law itself, since it is vulnerable to interference at the state and national levels. Finally, without strong tenant-advocacy and the

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ongoing addition of new housing units, even a strong rent-control law can quickly reach its limits.

Compared with other cities, Santa Monica is extraordinary in its attempts to improve the lives of renters, the elderly, the disabled, and other traditionally disenfranchised groups, all within a "human scale," mixed-use vision drawn from urbanologists such as Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford. Previous evaluations of Santa Monica's progressive government have often failed to document these accomplishments. We find that ten years after the "progressive experiment" was initiated, Santa Monica provides important lessons in institutionalizing gains that challenge a traditional urban agenda, while dramatizing the obstacles faced by elected officials everywhere.

C^N_R

Notes

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