Boomers & Millennials

San Jose State University | Urban Planning Coalition | Fall 2014 Symposium

Planning for Changing Demographics in the Bay Area
The Urban Planning Coalition (UPC) organized and hosted its annual Fall Symposium on October 18, 2014. The Symposium is one of the UPC’s richest traditions, providing a full-day conference and open forum for students and professionals to engage in a current planning topic together. This year, the Symposium was titled, “Boomers & Millennials: Planning for Changing Demographics in the Bay Area.”

San Francisco Planning Director John Rahaim delivered the keynote speech on developing cities for urban dwellers of all ages, particularly for the growing generations of Boomers and Millennials. Millennials, he discussed, are less interested in buying things and more interested in finding experiences, yet he cautioned that this shifting balance could turn the city from shopping mall into playground. He urged planners to facilitate a blurring of the edges between public and private urban spaces to welcome people of all backgrounds and stages of life into the city. In planning for inclusive and appealing communities, our three primary goals should be resilience, diversity, and adaptability.

The first panel, “Cities and the Sharing Economy,” continued to set the tone for the day. Led by moderator Laurel Prevetti, Community Development Director for the Town of Los Gatos, panelists represented sharing economy startups and the Oakland Economic Development Department. Spurred by the reminder that cities are in fact built for sharing, the panelists discussed topics in the sharing economy ranging from the rise of entrepreneurship and part-time, on-demand employment to the facilitation of more equitable and efficient food systems.

After a networking lunch, attendees reconvened for the second panel, “Life beyond Privately-Owned Cars.” Joseph Kott, professor at Stanford and SJSU, moderated this panel with panelists from transportation firms and the San Jose Downtown Association. Panelists discussed dementia-ready transportation systems, the historic downturn in vehicle miles traveled, and the possibilities of shared autonomous vehicles.

Trulia researcher Ralph McLaughlin moderated the final panel, “Micro-Units and Aging in Place” with panelists from real estate and policy advocacy. In a spirited conversation, panelists presented alternatives for how to balance the economic need for diverse and affordable housing with the deeply human need for connected community.

At this year’s Symposium, all of the UPC’s goals were achieved. We brought together students, alumni, and professionals from throughout the Bay Area to discuss a planning topic critical for the success of future communities. The day was smoothly executed, with some minor problems (a speaker arriving nearly late, miscommunication with catering about the arrival time of lunch) that were quickly and efficiently solved through unified, calm coordination. In the end, two metrics demonstrated our success: first, over 120 attendees filled the venue, leaving standing room only for much of the day, and second, networking breaks were filled with spirited conversation, making reconvening a long task in itself. In its own small way, the UPC Symposium sparked conversation and worked to elevate the planning profession for attendees and participants.
Beginning during the summer, we planned the Symposium in six steps.

First, we reviewed the successes and challenges of past Symposia. As every year, we had a wealth of past experience from which to learn. Past Symposia have covered topics ranging from planning for healthy communities to public–private partnerships post redevelopment with keynote speakers including a director at the California Energy Commission and the Senior Health Advisor at the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research. We learned big lessons from past Symposia, such as the benefit of advertising early and often, and small lessons, such as having a backup plan for a late panelist.

Second, we selected our own Symposium theme with the guiding principles that the topic be: a) rigorously relevant to contemporary planning; b) rarely or only lightly covered in course materials; and c) of interest to a broad range of planning specializations. After an initial brainstorm, one of our board members compiled a summary sheet (included in this application) of our top choices. We voted for the theme “Boomers & Millennials: Planning for Changing Demographics in the Bay Area.”

Third, we reserved a venue and contacted potential keynote speakers, panelists, and moderators. For our venue, we selected our own King Library to showcase the only library in the nation that is both a university and a public library, representing both a figurative and literal bridge between the university and the city. We asked San Francisco Planning Director John Rahaim to be our keynote speaker, since he directs planning for one of the cities at the center of the “back to the city” movement that surrounds topics of urban age-based demographic trends. We were thrilled that he agreed. Every board member listed people they knew or wanted to reach out to for participating in a panel. Ideally, we wanted panelists from communities around the Bay Area, representing a diverse race, gender, and age spectrum, and from public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Fourth, we recruited sponsors and attendees. Never has a UPC Symposium attracted so many financial and outreach sponsors. Our sponsors included: APA California Northern, SPUR, Greenbelt Alliance, and TransForm. Attached is the flyer we sent to students, alumni, and professionals in our effort to attract a full range of planners-in-training and those currently in the practice of planning, policy-making, research, and community organizing.

Fifth, we coordinated logistics and recruited volunteers. Logistics coordination included catering, directional signage for the library, delegating a photographer, applying for and advertising approved CM credits, and preparing a transportation handout for easy, clear travel for attendees and panelists alike (included in application packet). We targeted first-year graduate students to be volunteers, since the Symposium has been a great way of immersing new graduate students into the profession through both learning and networking. Volunteering for a range of easy yet engaging tasks allows them to be both present and active.

Finally, after a successful Symposium, we celebrated and debriefed. Next year, we hope the Symposium can be an even more important event for planners around the Bay Area.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

— UPC Executive Board, 2014 - 2015