

UC SANTA BARBARA

# THE *Current*

July 17, 2000

Bill Schlotter

## **UCSB BOOK DESCRIBES HOW BUILDING REGULATION EFFORTS SHAPE THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OF COMMUNITY**

The battle goes on in nearly every community throughout the country:

On one side, proponents of business and development, believers that the community must grow to prosper.

On the other, those committed to maintaining the community's ambiance and environmental qualities just as they are.

University of California, Santa Barbara sociologist Harvey Molotch and graduate student Kee Warner studied how such battles played out in three diverse California communities -- Santa Barbara, Santa Monica and Riverside -- during the final decades of the 20th century.

What they found in their studies -- the ways the communities were and were not able to influence local development -- is contained in their new book, *Building Rules:*

*How Local Controls Shape Community Environments and Economies* (Westview Press).

Molotch and Warner -- now an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs -- began their study to determine if there was any truth to developers' claims that growth controls reduce the supply of affordable housing and undermine the community's economic health.

Likewise, they wanted to see what lay behind environmentalist claims that such controls enhance the planning process and the community's quality of life.

"What we learned is that it is doubtful that the controls actually stopped growth from occurring," Molotch said. "But the controls did impact the type of growth that each place got."

In all, the controls were beneficial to the communities, Molotch said, if not outright panaceas to the problems they addressed.

In some cases, the controls operated in a traditional manner.

Developers were asked in the course of the planning process to mitigate impacts of their projects.

If increased traffic was foreseen, they were asked to widen roads and build parking facilities.

If increased population was predicted, they were asked to set aside funds for school expansion, park construction and the like.

In other cases, planning departments were creative in requiring developers to address other community needs in order to receive approval.

To help the city conserve water, one Santa Monica project, a 100,000 square-foot office building, was required to put up \$35,000 to retrofit an elementary school with low-flow toilets and plumbing.

A shopping center project paid out \$300,000 to be used on services for the city's homeless and \$150,000 for public art and on-site childcare.

Growth occurred, but helped address other community problems.

Such would not have been the case if Santa Monica had not had a tough growth policy, Molotch said.

"When you have tight restrictions, it strengthens the hand of planners to grant exceptions for projects which best achieve local goals," he said.

"That's what so-called smart growth is all about."

Indeed.

And from what Molotch and Warner have discovered, many communities may benefit.

---

## **About UC Santa Barbara**

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.