

Los Angeles Section

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" Many people take no care of their money till they come nearly to the end of it, and others do just the same with their time. "

— Goethe

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Neil D. Morrison, P.E.

President, Los Angeles Section, ASCE

WHY DO HOUSES COST SO MUCH – PART II

There are several major steps to the process by which an owner/land developer brings a Master Planned Community into being. Although I learned most of these steps while working as a consultant for The Irvine Company, the following information is applicable almost anywhere in Southern California.

1. Land Planning. This phase brings together the expertise of land planners, architects, civil engineers, market researchers, and landscape architects, and the owner/land developer's own knowledge of the location and demand for the property's planned ultimate use. Conceptual layouts include residential planning areas, roadways, infrastructure, supporting land uses such as commercial and retail, schools (if required), and parks. The conceptual layouts are designed to maximize the use of the land to meet demand for homes and other amenities, and, of course, maximize the rate of return on the investment.

This effort requires strict attention to requirements for open space, habitat preservation, water quality and other biological, paleontological and cultural considerations—which can get real tricky if the property has endangered or listed species which require certain habitat. Sometimes there are specific overlay zones such as oak trees or riding trails which have to be protected. Other impacts can be Army Corps of Engineers' blue streams, requiring protection and certain setbacks. Also during this stage, the civil engineer identifies all other constraints such as title, drainage, grading, utilities and other infrastructure impacts. The soils/geotechnical engineer identifies geological constraints and their impacts on development. It is also during this process that field surveys are conducted to identify issues such as the size and location of certain trees, the location of any endangered species, the migratory patterns of any wild animals crossing the property, archeological surveys, paleontological surveys, biological surveys, etc., all of which could be constraints to the development.

The owner/land developer must have a thorough understanding of the local governing agency's General Plan and zoning, and determine whether the project will require a General Plan Amendment and/or zone change. This could become a political constraint.

Once the ultimate land use has been determined by the owner/land developer and the team of experts, a pro forma cost analysis is done, utilizing information from numerous sources including civil engineers, geotechnical engineers, contractors, architects, landscape architects and sales and marketing individuals, and others. This analysis gives the owner/land developer an early estimate of potential costs to deliver the final product to home builders, commercial or retail builders, or custom lot builders. Simultaneously with the pro forma cost analysis, sales and marketing people are doing their own analysis to determine the sales price for finished lots or super pads. Using these two analyses, the owner/land developer can estimate the rate of return if the project moves forward.

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Reminder: Copy deadline for the December 2004 newsletter is November 1, 2004; copy deadline for the January 2005 issue is December 1, 2004.



News of Change and Appeal for Respect

Holiday greetings to all of you!

For many of us, this will be the last paper copy issue that you will see. Beginning with the January 2005 issue, we are going to send out only paper copies to our Los Angeles Section Student Members and Life Members. The rest of us will be receiving a postcard instead, outlining what is in the current issue of the newsletter and the website address of where you can download the whole edition. To make the information timely we will also be posting the current issue of the newsletter on the day we send the paper copies and the postcards out to the post office. That way, as soon as you receive your newsletter notice you can immediately read what we have prepared for you. For those who will continue to receive the paper copy, you will remain to enjoy the newsletter as you have always been.

Please note that this decision was made only after a careful review of the responses from members regarding my inquiry on receipt of newsletter paper copies last summer. From the three months that we waited for your response, the prevailing idea we heard was that people who have ready access to computers do not mind downloading e-copies for them to peruse/read while those of us who are computer challenged or are too pre-occupied with schoolwork tend to prefer continuing to see the paper copy. We will try this set-up for a few months, most likely until the end of the fiscal year in August 2005, and determine at that point whether to continue the practice or not. Your newsletter staff realizes that change is sometimes scary, but we are confident that this is the best arrangement for all concerned. Drop me a line if you need to vent out an opinion.

I also want to remind our members and readership alike that your newsletter staff, except for the printer, works on bringing you these monthly issues as **volunteers**. We do not gain any monetary benefits nor have any personal interest in any of the advertisements or articles printed. Thus, my appeal to those who feel like they have been shortchanged for whatever reason by your newsletter staff should take in consideration the fact that all of us do this because we love doing it. None of the members of this staff deserve to be scolded at on the phone or be unprofessionally treated, as has happened a number of times in the last few months. Though volunteers, we ensure that all of our transactions with you and our advertisers are done in a very professional and courteous manner. Yes, we do have our shortcomings, and I, in particular, am the quickest in admitting my mistakes and take on the responsibilities for those mistakes. Our financial transactions are open book and our operations are open to any scrutiny. Again, my appeal to you is for us to be treated in a professional manner the same way we treat any of our customers. It is difficult enough to get willing volunteers; it is almost impossible to retain disgruntled volunteers.

Thanks for your time. Enjoy this issue!
May the blessings of this Holiday Season be with you and your family!

- Cris B. Liban, D.Env.

Letter to the Editor

I wanted to pass on my support of Neil's message and the strategy of putting ourselves out there to raise the status and make a difference in our profession.

I have recently personally taken a promotion out of a comfortable design position into a demanding management position with this very focus on mind here in San Luis Obispo County. I have been an active, section dues paying ASCE member for over 25 years. President Galloway recently wrote a similar extensive article in the ASCE News encouraging advancement of our profession through numerous avenues, including upward mobility of our engineers to make a difference in management and politics. President Galloway's article in part contributed to my decision to seriously stretch myself and pursue the management track to do my part to further the local civil engineering expertise pool in these influential areas. I now have the opportunity and challenge to do what I can to influence and promote our profession in the operations and strategies in which our County is involved.

Since I do not have Neil's email address, I thought you could forward this, and my thanks for succinctly presenting this message on to him for me. Thanks for the continuing encouragement.

Dean Benedix, RCE
Utilities Division Manager
San Luis Obispo County Public Works Department

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Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge Historical Landmark Designation



Steve Wyatt of CalTrans, Steve Marvin of the L.A. Section of ASCE, and Tom Wolfington of the Section's Santa Barbara/Ventura Branch with the pedestal-mounted plaque before its unveiling.



Steve Wyatt and Steve Marvin unveiling the plaque.

Norman Root, Project Director, California Surface Transportation Science Center and Museum in Sacramento, with the plaque. →



← A close-up of the plaque.

In its ongoing effort to provide commemorative plaques for previously designated Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks within the Los Angeles Section of ASCE, the Section's History & Heritage Committee arranged for the placement of such a plaque honoring the Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge on State Highway 154, north of Santa Barbara. An unveiling ceremony for that plaque was held on October 29, 2004, attended by representatives of CalTrans, the L.A. Section of ASCE, and of the Section's Santa Barbara/Ventura Branch. The ceremony was followed by a CalTrans-hosted reception at the Cold Spring Tavern. The pedestal-mounted plaque is actually located on the old Stagecoach Road, about 1/2 mile NW from the Cold Spring Tavern, at a point affording an excellent view of the arch bridge on Highway 154.

Constructed by the California Division of Highways (CalTrans' predecessor agency) between June 1962 and January 1964, the bridge was one of the longest steel arch bridges in the United States at the time of construction. It was also one of the first major arch structures to use all welded steel sections. The structure was designated an L.A. Section Historic Landmark in 1976 at which time, however, only a Certificate of Recognition was issued to the owner. Placement of the present bronze plaque was spearheaded and coordinated by Bob Burks, a member and former Vice Chairman of the L.A. Section's History and Heritage Committee.



View of the bridge from the plaque site.



A copy of the original Certificate of Recognition.

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(All photographs are taken by George Horowitz.)



Another view of the bridge. →

President's Message

continued

This first process, land planning, on large parcels of land such as The Irvine Ranch, Rancho Mission Viejo, Newhall Land and Farm, etc., can take years to develop and cost millions of dollars, depending on the complexity of the constraints, the terrain and the political environment. Please note that the owner/land developer carries all costs associated with this phase, including interest and overhead, throughout the project, until such time as the sale of the land can recover these costs.

2. Entitlement. During the entitlement process, the owner/land developer works through a rigorous process with the local governing agency to prepare, submit and process the required documentation in order to gain full entitlement on the land. Again, the owner/land developer chooses a team of experts, usually many of the same as in the land planning phase, to assist in the development and processing of the required entitlement documents. In addition, this phase typically requires the services of an EIR (Environmental Impact Report) writer, an attorney, fire master plan consultant, traffic engineering consultant, and others as necessary to complete and obtain approval for the required documents. In most cases, this process requires a General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, Environmental Impact Report (EIR), Tentative Tract Map(s), and a Specific Plan. Please note that each of these applications requires separate specific documentation and separate submittal and processing fees, and public hearings, before approval can be achieved.

Why a General Plan Amendment? Per State law, each governing entity (city or county) is required to have a General Plan, and typically new Master Planned Communities were not considered in the particular governing agency's initial or revised General Plan. So, the owner/land developer of a new Master Planned Community within that governing agency's jurisdiction must amend or revise the General Plan for the proposed project.

Why a Zone Change? Each parcel of land within the specific jurisdiction has been designated with some type of zoning. Land for new Master Planned Communities is often already zoned Agricultural, which allows some uses but will not meet the requirements of the land use being proposed. Therefore, a Zone Change is required to specifically identify land uses throughout the new project.

Why A Specific Plan? The purpose of a Specific plan is to identify features such as street widths, landscape standards, architectural standards, and other items that the owner/land developer and the governing agency want to keep standard throughout the life of the project.

Why a Tentative Tract Map? State law mandates that, in order to sell a piece of property it must be a legal parcel of land. This normally requires filing and recording of a Tract or Parcel Map. A Tentative Tract Map is the first phase in the process of a final recorded tract or parcel map. A Tentative Tract Map identifies the location of all future lots within the project and is always consistent with the zoning. As with the other previously discussed documents, the Tentative Tract Map requires additional specific documents, submittal and processing, including fees, and like the other documents requires a public hearing before any action can be taken.

Why an EIR? State law requires it, per CEQA 1972. **ANY** project that does not have (and some that do have) a previously approved environmental

assessment, must prepare an Initial Study answering a series of questions regarding impacts the project may have, and the significant effects these impacts may have on issues such as the environment, traffic, noise, water quality, biological, paleontological, archeological, air, habitat, endangered species, and cultural resources. If it is determined the impacts from the project are significant enough, and no previous environmental assessment has been done or does not cover the project adequately, a determination is then made by the governing agency that an EIR is required.

Preparation of an EIR includes summarizing previous studies, doing new studies, and then attempting to write a document incorporating all of the analysis and input, so as to address the concerns of CEQA while ensuring that the project will be a positive addition to the community in which it is planned. The EIR is written to support the General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, Specific Plan and Tentative Tract Map(s), thus fulfilling the CEQA requirements for each of these documents. Usually, an EIR is prepared by the governmental agency, thus removing control of this document from the owner/land developer. In some agencies, this is accomplished by use of a list of agency-approved consultants for the owner/land developer to choose from. In any case, the owner/land developer pays the bill.

Throughout the entitlement process, the owner/land developer tries to get a sense of any potential problems and issues that might arise, through many community outreach meetings and workshops with residents, agency staff and, sometimes, with planning commissioners and council members, before any documents are actually submitted for processing and public hearing notice. Sometimes, no matter what you do, you cannot please everyone. That's why some projects end up in court for years.

Like the first process (land planning), this second process (entitlement) can take years and cost millions of dollars. Some projects of The Irvine Ranch, Rancho Mission Viejo, Newhall Land and Farm, and many, many others can take decades to get through this process—and the owner/land developer carries the costs associated with the entitlement process throughout the length of the project, until such time as the sale of the land can cover these costs, including any interest and overhead.

At this point in the project, the owner/land developer can have millions of dollars invested and, even when the project is finally officially and **legally** approved, is still not in a position to sell any of the land and begin recouping some of the costs. Final engineering and mapping still needs to take place.

Next month, I will walk you through the next phases of a project: final engineering, mapping, construction and delivery. I hope the foregoing has been informative.

Neil D. Morrison, P.E.

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Greg Drilling Seminar

Younger Member Forum (YMF)

Everyone is welcome to attend our upcoming events!!

- SB/RC YMF General Meeting, 12/06/04, Riverside, CA
- LA YMF Board Meeting, 12/14/04, Alhambra, CA
- Cal Poly/SB/RC YMF Happy Hour, 12/18/04, TBD
- OC YMF Christmas Boat Parade & Toys for Tots Drive, 12/18/04, Balboa Island, CA
- OC YMF Board Meeting, 12/21/04, Irvine, CA
- SB/RC YMF Speaker Series, TBD

Contact Greg Sommer at gsommer@ladpw.org to be added to the Younger Member e-mail distribution list and receive announcement on all upcoming YMF events, tours, and other activities.

Please visit our websites:

- LA YMF - <http://www.asce-laymf.org/>
- OC YMF - http://www.ascelasection.org/yymf_main.cfm?ID=9

A Great Idea From the Life Members

The ASCE Life Members' Public Image Committee request that members take their (to be discarded) Civil Engineering magazines to their doctor's office or barber shop and merge them with the stack of magazines. We feel that this will be an effective way to make the general public more aware of what civil engineers do.

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P.E. REVIEW COURSE - REGISTER NOW!!

The LA YMF sponsors a 9-week, PE Review Course for the April 2005 exam. Classes are held two nights a week (Tuesday and Thursday), from 6:30pm to 9:30pm, at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Headquarters Building in Alhambra. Classes begin on January 4th, 2005 and end on March 8th, 2005. The course is taught by professional engineers and university instructors. The class is open to all civil engineers preparing for the exam. Course features include:

- Comprehensive coverage of all subjects addressed by the eight-hour exam as well as those covered by the California Special Survey and Seismic portion of the exam.
- Course fees includes several textbooks, lecture notes, and practice problems.
- Enrollment is usually around 20 students.

Course fees are \$550 for the Overall PE Review Series, \$450 for the 8-Hour Exam Section only, and \$250 each for the Seismic and Survey Review Section. For more information or to obtain a review course application, please contact Melissa Murphy at (626) 300-2025 or by e-mail memurphy@ladpw.org or Nickolas VanGunst at (626) 300 2022 or by e-mail ngunst@ladpw.org. Application must be postmarked by December 23, 2004 to avoid late registration fee.

P.E. License Review Course

The RBF Consulting P.E. License Review Course for the April 15th and 16th, 2005 professional license exam will begin on January 8, 2005 and continue for thirteen (13) Saturdays, ending on April 9, 2005. The course is taught by practicing professionals and includes several unique features:

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For more information please contact Ms. Debi Blake at (949) 855-7032 or via e-mail dblake@rbf.com. You may also log onto our website to review the course schedule and register at <http://www.rbf.com>.

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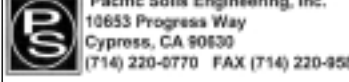
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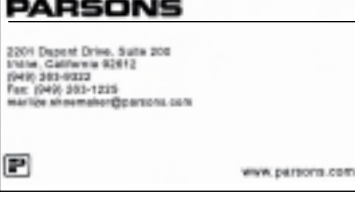
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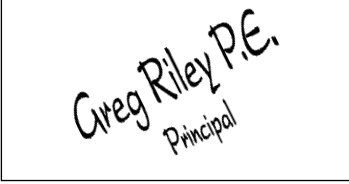


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