



A few days ago, [I noted that](#) Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa likes to talk a good game when it comes to Greening the city, but conveniently abandons plans when they become politically difficult or require anything like a normal attention span.

I was more right than I thought. I mentioned that the Mayor had hired visionary planning director Gail Goldberg, but never supported her when she needed it.

Well, now it turns out that [Goldberg has “retired” effective July 16th](#). That is an enormous loss for a city that has never taken planning seriously. Goldberg was the first planning director to do so, while articulating a compelling vision of smart growth. And that made her a list of powerful enemies: NIMBY champion County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, homeowners association leader Jane Usher, and LA Weekly political editor Jill Stewart, who seems to combine libertarianism, NIMBYism (which is libertarianism’s opposite) and anger management problems.



The irony is that Goldberg's smart growth vision was very bottom-up: her leading project was the review and rewriting of the City's 35 "community plans," which is LA-speak for the required land use element of the City's general plan. For the first time, the Planning Department was trying to work with neighborhood associations to put smart growth principles into these community plans. Equally impressive in my view was her commitment to transparency: as planning director for the City of San Diego, she championed the practice of placing project mitigation funds into separate accounts, the details of which would be accessible over the web: that way, City residents would know where the funds were and most important, what they were spent on.

That sort of thing is unheard of in Los Angeles, where the City Council likes to maintain firm and opaque control over as much money as possible. Little wonder that only Council President Eric Garcetti could have been counted on as a Goldberg ally; few other councilmembers had any interest in really visioning the City.

Goldberg's job was made immeasurably harder by factors that cannot be laid at the foot of the Mayor. Vicious budget cuts brought about by the recession and state government's dysfunctionality decimated the Planning Department (although I am obliged to say that much of the City budget is still going to pensions for former city workers now acting as private consultants, and thus drawing two salaries).

But after Yaroslavsky and the homeowners' groups started attacking her, and Robin Kramer left the Mayor's office (she was chief of staff), it was just a matter of time before Goldberg was gone as well. The City Controller's office issued a study purporting to show that the department was inefficient and needlessly slow in processing permit requests, which is

probably true — and cannot be blamed on Goldberg: it takes time to turn the Departmental Aircraft Carrier around, and the obstacles are probably better placed on the Building and Safety Department and the Council offices.

So it's back to business as usual in the City of Angels. There will be no vision for the future. Development and homeowner interests will scream at each other. There will be less [density around transit stops](#), even with new sales tax money that promises more transit. We'll wonder: how come we can never do the wonderful things that they do in other cities? At least Gail Goldberg will know why.