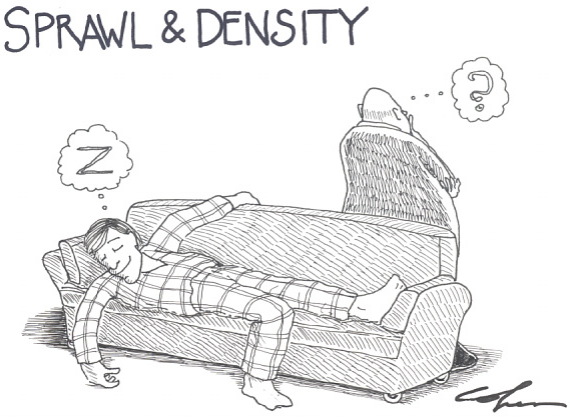

The Public Policy Institute of California just released its new report on SB 375, California's smart growth law. I'm still working my way through it, and at the beginning, it seems pretty boilerplate. For example, it notes that three things California can do to reduce emissions are

1. "Higher-density development, particularly in areas well-served by transit;
2. "Investments in alternatives to solo driving, such as transit, walking, biking, and carpooling; and
3. "Pricing policies that raise the cost of driving and parking."

Well, knock me over with a feather. Next thing you know you'll be telling me that the sun rises in the east. But even within the executive summary, the authors of the report make an excellent point that I admit (somewhat sheepishly) had not occurred to me before.

Yes, we need to plan for more density, but reducing emissions really requires more *employment density,* not residential density. If this is true, it makes the path of emissions reduction both easier and more difficult.

It makes it more difficult because it is harder to control the locations of job centers. In a dynamic economy, no one knows really where the job centers will be, and thus it's difficult to plan well for them. This is particularly true in southern California, where jobs are in small to medium-sized businesses.

But if we can somehow get a handle on that, it makes the *political* task easier, because it means that reducing emissions does not have to wage such an uphill battle against traditional single-family home developments. Note *traditional* single-family home developments: even smart growth has a lot of single-family residences, but just a somewhat different mix of these, multifamily, and denser single-family home formations (such as without front lawns, allowing for more density while maintaining single-family homes).

In any event, it's a lot easier *politically* to tell businesses to crowd closer together than to tell homeowners to do so.

So we still have our work cut out for us; it just may be very different work than we thought. I'm really looking forward to finishing the report, which at 22 pages isn't too heavy a lift. Even after the executive summary, it's well worth a read.