City Planning in Oakland and Los Angeles

Influenced by the planning efforts in San Francisco, but affected even more by local developments, the residents of Oakland and Los Angeles participated in city planning campaigns. As in San Francisco, the planning movements had diverse origins; but businessmen again played central roles. Business organizations were very active in promoting improvements, and businessmen composed the bulk of the membership in various civic improvement bodies in both cities. Businessmen were not alone in sponsoring the planning campaigns. Charles Mumford Robinson, a well-known eastern planning advocate, prepared a city plan for Oakland in 1906 and a similar one for Los Angeles a year later. City planning in those cities involved more than the Robinson plans, however. In Los Angeles in particular planning assumed varied forms, including one of the pioneering efforts at citywide zoning in the United States.
The Origins of Planning in Oakland

The most powerful initial impetus for the planning movement in Oakland lay in a desire by business leaders to maintain their city’s attractiveness as a bedroom suburb of San Francisco. Pamphlets distributed by the Board of Trade in the 1880s and 1890s advertised Oakland as “largely a city of homes” where “almost every dwelling is provided with an ever-green lawn and an ever-blooming garden.”1 Oaklanders soon came to see the creation of parks and boulevards as a way to protect and enhance the appearance of their city, and thus the values of their own private property, and it was with an effort to improve upon and add to the city’s parks that planning began in Oakland.

Oaklanders were not alone in that approach. Parks were often included in the agendas of proponents of city improvements and city plans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Parks and boulevards were components in the Burnham Plan for San Francisco. They would become, as well, significant parts of the planning campaigns in Portland and Seattle. Taking their cue from landscape architects like Frederick Law Olmsted, planners throughout the nation saw parks as improving the urban landscape in myriad ways. As Oaklanders asserted, parks could enhance the value of nearby private property, thus boosting the city’s tax base. Parks could also improve a city’s economic base by attracting tourists and settlers. Social considerations were also important. As Burnham argued, parks could instill certain values and ways of thinking in those who used them, especially children. Parks could, as well, serve as alternatives to saloons and street gangs—an argument put forward especially in Seattle. A humanitarian concern could thereby mix with an economic one, the desire to combat disorderly conduct and crime.

As early as the 1860s, less than twenty years after the founding of Oakland, Olmsted, who was already well known nationally for his design of Central Park in New York and for his work on the capitol grounds of Washington, D.C., visited Oakland and recommended the establishment of a park system. Olmsted was in California to view Yosemite, which he was trying to convince Congress to preserve as a national park. While there, he agreed to
came to Oakland to design the Mountain View Cemetery; and he took advantage of his trip to call upon Oaklanders to establish a park system. Olmsted envisioned a belt of parks along the crest of the Oakland hills, extending down through the town along canyons and creeks. Nothing came of Olmsted’s ideas at the time, but they would influence twentieth-century planners.\(^2\)

Lake Merritt, a saltwater estuary connected to San Francisco Bay and extending inland into the center of Oakland, lay at the heart of subsequent plans to improve the city’s parks. Private actions both aided and hampered the development of Lake Merritt as a recreation area. A private citizen, Dr. Samuel Merritt, formed the “lake” by damming its outlet to the bay in 1868. By the 1880s and 1890s, however, population growth in Oakland and the spread
of private residences around the banks of Lake Merritt threatened the body of water with sewage. For several years, Lake Merritt had, as one contemporary writer put it, "a reputation of being unhealthy on account of defective sewerage, which caused a great deal of sickness in the shape of diphtheria and low malarial fever." The city acquired Lake Merritt from its private owners in 1891, setting the stage for its possible development as a park. The first major effort to use public funds for park improvements in Oakland occurred in 1892. In that year the city council placed two park bond issues, each for $400,000, before the voters. One provided for the dredging of Lake Merritt and its encirclement by a scenic boulevard, according to plans drawn up by the city engineer. The other called for the draining of marshes in West Oakland and the conversion of the wetlands into a park, including areas for tennis, baseball, and football. Particularly noteworthy at a time when the playground movement was just beginning in the United States was the proposition that a part of the West Oakland park consist of "a large open meadow dotted here and there with groups of trees, and dedicated to the children for a play and picnic ground." The park bond issues won strong backing from Oakland's business organizations. The Board of Trade, the Federated Trades Association, and the Retail Clerks Association (an organization of middle-level store managers) came out for them. Employing arguments that would become the standard ones used by park advocates in Pacific Coast cities, members of those associations equated parks with economic gain. The president of the Board of Trade noted that the cost of the bonds was "not burdensome" when compared to the anticipated benefits. Similarly, one of Oakland's leading merchants, Hugo Abrahamson, claimed that "the building of a boulevard about Lake Merritt and the transformation of the West Oakland marsh into a park will attract people, and everything that draws people to the city makes business of all sorts better." Labor leaders also supported the bonds. The head of the Carpenters' Union explained that the passage of the bonds would "mean work and wages for a long period to several hundred men in all ranks of labor." Oakland's leading businessmen formed the Oakland Improvement League to push for the bonds. Its members equated business development with civic progress and quickly came to view approval of the park bonds as one way to place Oakland on an
equal footing with its counterparts on the Pacific Coast and across the nation. Passage of the bonds would, they thought, signal that their city had arrived as a major force in America's growing urban network. Civic pride, as well as economic growth, was at stake. The organization's chairman summed up the reasons many businessmen thought the bonds should be approved in a pamphlet titled *Vote for Progress* published on the eve of the election:

It will increase the volume of local trade, give work to our idle laboring men, stimulate private enterprise, and add a large sum of money in local circulation. Better than all, voting the bonds will give notice to the outside world that Oakland has taken up her march on the high road of progress. . . . We trust every citizen will sink all petty considerations and resolve to do his best to give Oakland her proper place among cities.  

Despite such support, the bonds failed to win approval. Like most of the bonds issued by Pacific Coast cities, they were general obligation bonds requiring a favorable two-thirds vote. Although a majority of voters favored the bonds, they did not secure the necessary two-thirds vote. Some voters feared that the city government might waste the money, while others were opposed to any possible increase in their tax rates. In spite of the defeat, the city government made some improvements to Lake Merritt over the next few years by constructing sewers and directing their outflow away from the lake into San Francisco Bay.

After being sidetracked by the depression of the mid-1890s, the issue of park improvements was revived in 1898 when the city council placed a park bond issue of $320,000, most of which was designated for the purchase and improvement of sixty-two acres on the shores of Lake Merritt, on the ballot. The city council, Board of Trade, and Merchants' Exchange all came out publicly for the bonds. As they had six years before, park bond proponents formed an umbrella committee—headed by the secretary of the Oakland Gas and Light Company and composed of merchants, manufacturers, city officials, lawyers, and the president of the Pacific Theological Seminary—to campaign for the bonds.

In public presentations and widely distributed broadsides, the
committee members praised parks for their social and moral influences. “A park has a distinct influence in favor of public morality,” claimed one advocate, for “in a public place, under the eyes of his fellows, surrounded by healthful outdoor influences, a person can not be engaged in anything very wrong.” Moreover, he continued, “A park is a humanizing institution, because it brings all the people together. It is a neutral ground of ranks and classes. The poorest man owns as much of the public park as the richest. . . . But for it the two extremes in the social scale in our largest cities would never see each other.”

The expected economic benefits of parks also continued to win the attention of the supporters of the park bonds. Parks would increase the value of nearby private properties and, more generally, of land throughout Oakland. “Investment in parks has proven remunerative to every city which has been wise enough to make provision in this direction,” explained one of the broadsides. “The purchase and improvement of this tract will add to the attractiveness of Oakland as a place of residence, and thus increase the value of every foot of land in the city.” Still more was involved, for, as in 1892, bond supporters argued that nothing less than the fate of their city was at stake. They claimed that approval of the bonds would “show the world that we have faith in ourselves, faith in the future of our beautiful city.”

Nonetheless, the bonds again went down to defeat at the polls. As they had six years before, the park bonds won a simple majority but not the required two-thirds of the votes. With that defeat, the Oakland Enquirer concluded that Oakland had “lost its last opportunity to create a park on the shores of the lake.” Such predictions proved wrong. Oakland was just entering a period of hectic civic improvements.

The Robinson Plan for Oakland

As Oakland moved out from beneath the shadow of San Francisco in the opening years of the twentieth century, its residents turned to civic improvements and city planning as ways of claiming what they viewed as their rightful place in the sun. The Oak-
land Board of Trade continued to trumpet the city as a place where "many of the residences are palatial and . . . surrounded by either lawn or flowers" and as "a city of homes, commerce, culture and churches." Increasingly, however, the board advertised Oakland as a port city and manufacturing center: "the natural waterfront center of a state three times the size of New York" and "the terminus of all transcontinental railroads." Oakland was hurt less than San Francisco by the 1906 earthquake. As Oakland's mayor observed, "The earthquake this morning visited upon our City a great calamity, yet it is a source of much satisfaction that we were spared from a conflagration and serious loss of life." Oakland's rapid ascent as a center of trade and industry after the earthquake and fire of 1906 brought new concerns to the fore. More than in the past, Oaklanders concentrated on building the infrastructure needed for the continued development of their city.

Frank Mott led the city in its growth. What James Phelan was for San Francisco, Mott was for Oakland: a business leader who saw in politics a way to shape his city's future. A self-made man in the hardware business, Mott entered politics as a city councilman in 1894. Endorsed by both the Republicans and Democrats, he won election as mayor in 1905, a post he held until he stepped down ten years later. Like Phelan, Mott saw business and civic developments as naturally proceeding hand in hand. At the same time that he was mayor, Mott became deeply involved in real estate development, serving as the president of the Oakland Real Estate Board and the California State Realty Federation. If Mott was similar to Phelan in his outlook on civic development, his impact was greater. With fewer ethnic and socioeconomic divisions separating groups within his city, Mott proved more effective in making his desires reality.

Enjoying immense popularity throughout Oakland, Mott acted as a progressive mayor. One urban historian has called Mott's administration "the very model of progressive city government." Mott initiated civil service jobs in the city government and secured adoption of a new city charter. Concerned about city services, he reorganized the police and fire departments, built new water and sewer lines, placed electric wires underground, and installed new street lighting. Deeply interested in parks and civic improvements, Mott provided active governmental leadership in those areas. In 1905 and 1906, Mott, who been been a leader in the
1898 bond campaign, altered the city’s method of administering its parks and initiated some improvements, including the dredging of Lake Merritt and the construction of Harrison Boulevard. As was so often the case among Pacific Coast business and political leaders, civic pride, a desire to see his city accepted as a member of the nation’s network of cities, motivated Mott. As a result of his actions, Mott could tell his fellow Oaklanders with considerable justification in his farewell speech in 1915, “We have come up out of a minor place to a position of strength, influence, well-being, comfort, and convenience among our sister cities.”

In one of his more far-reaching moves, Mott, with the concurrence of the city council, invited Charles Mumford Robinson to come to Oakland and draw up a plan for the city’s future development. Robinson was a nationally known proponent of the city beautiful. In the late 1890s, Robinson had written a series of articles about municipal improvements for the Atlantic Monthly, and in 1899 he toured European cities to prepare a similar series for Harper’s Magazine. From those experiences came Robinson’s first book, The Improvement of Cities and Towns, in 1901, followed by a second volume, Modern Civic Art, just a few years later. In those widely read works Robinson popularized the idea that people could control and improve the physical environments of their cities. He espoused the notion that civic art joined utility to beauty, that there was “nothing effeminate [by which Robinson meant weak] and sentimental” about art and civic improvements—an argument that won praise from improvement groups and business organizations across the nation.

One of the national leaders in the city beautiful movement, Robinson would eventually prepare some twenty-five city planning reports and in 1913 would be awarded the Chair of Civic Design at the University of Illinois. According to William Wilson, the leading historian of the city beautiful movement, Robinson “adopted a comprehensive view of the city” in all of his work. That is, Robinson “exempted no urban area from beautification effort.” Nonetheless, Robinson’s vision, while broad for his time, was far from truly comprehensive, for many urban concerns simply lay beyond his ken.

After visiting Oakland several times in 1905 and 1906, Robinson drafted a plan for the city and submitted it to Mott in May 1906. Like the plans prepared for other Pacific Coast cities, the Robin-
son Plan for Oakland sought to cope with the consequences of urban growth. "Oakland can hardly fail now to increase even more rapidly than heretofore in population and in business," Robinson predicted in the preface to his plan. "You have to plan for a great city." Robinson further claimed that his plan was comprehensive. "Nor shall we be dealing with only esthetic needs," he declared. "Modern city building is a science as much as art [and] has to do also with social, moral, and industrial problems." As in his plans for other cities, Robinson asserted in his plan for Oakland that "beauty is not an ornament to be stuck on. Its essence lies in its structural utility."¹⁹ Robinson certainly saw his plan as addressing the social and economic, as well as the aesthetic, needs of Oaklanders; for him all three types of concerns were closely intermixed.

In fact, Robinson’s plan dealt mainly with the need for parks and boulevards. Much of the plan discussed the creation of large parks connected by drives and parkways. Robinson stressed the urgent need to make a park out of the land surrounding Lake Merritt and to build a boulevard around the lake. Robinson also called for the development of a three-hundred-acre park in Indian Gulch just to the northeast of the lake as a site for "picturesque and romantic walks and drives." From Indian Gulch a parkway would extend to Dimond Canyon and then on to East Oakland. Robinson urged that Oaklanders connect the proposed city park system with a still larger county park system. Beyond his suggestions for large parks, Robinson called for numerous smaller neighborhood parks and playgrounds as ornamental pieces to beautify their parts of the city and as recreation centers. Finally, Robinson urged the appointment of a park commission to oversee all of the developments.²⁰

Robinson viewed the parks as helping Oakland both economically and socially. Noting that "Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle have already had the courage to do and plan much more," he suggested that the new parks would aid Oakland in its rivalry with other Pacific Coast cities. The parks would also benefit property owners by serving as firebreaks and by leading to an increase in property values. Most important to Robinson, however, was the social impact of the parks. The parks would, he thought, "alleviate the hard conditions of crowded humanity" and bring together "all the people, high and low, rich and poor, without distinction."²¹
Charles Robinson's plan for Oakland included a small civic center. From the Robinson Plan for Oakland.

Although most of Robinson's plan dealt with park and boulevard proposals, it gave consideration to other matters. Robinson suggested the construction of a small civic center consisting of a city hall, post office, and police building at the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Fourteenth Street. He also called for regulating billboards, removing wires over streets, improving street lighting, and replacing wooden street curbs with stone or concrete.²²

Robinson's plan contained nothing revolutionary. Many of his ideas for parks had been foreshadowed by Olmsted's concepts...
forty years earlier. Oaklanders had been talking about the need for a civic center for some time by 1906, and the other improvements suggested by Robinson had also long been under discussion. Only twenty pages long, the Robinson Plan for Oakland stood in sharp contrast to the ambitious remaking of San Francisco espoused by Daniel Burnham. It contained no wholesale street changes or plans for a grandiose civic center. Even more than the Burnham Plan, Robinson's plan ignored the housing needs of urban residents and did not intend to alter living arrangements in Oakland.

The relatively limited nature of the "Robinson Plan for Oakland" boded well for its adoption. So did the strong and effective political support given by Mayor Mott—again in marked contrast to the situation in San Francisco, where political divisions hindered the adoption of the Burnham Plan. Accepting the plan just a month after the San Francisco earthquake, Mott passed the plan on to the city council with the observation that it "is very comprehensive and contains many valuable and important suggestions. I commend it to your careful consideration."²³

Civic Improvements in Oakland

Mott had the city council print and distribute numerous copies of Robinson's plan. Then, to gain firsthand knowledge of what other cities were doing in the realms of parks and planning, Mott spent several weeks touring New York, Boston, Kansas City, Cleveland, and Chicago. He returned to Oakland more convinced than ever that civic improvements were needed for his city.²⁴ Nor was he alone. The Oakland Tribune mounted a campaign to clean up the city in late 1906 and early 1907, observing that the condition of many of even the city's major streets was "a disgrace to the people of Oakland."²⁵ A letter to the editor of the newspaper captured the growing desire on the part of Oaklanders for a more beautiful city. "Can not a movement be started in Oakland to give houses generally a coat of paint and to clean up and repair sidewalks and fences," the writer asked "How much cheer would come to visitors if the houses were painted with bright shining colors?"²⁶
The first major accomplishments based on Robinson’s ideas materialized when voters approved a $992,000 bond issue for park improvements in 1907. Pushed by Mott, the city council, and virtually all of Oakland’s leading businessmen, the bonds provided for the acquisition of ten pieces of property for park purposes, five of which bordered upon Lake Merritt.27 Like Robinson, Oaklanders saw the development of parks as benefiting their city in a variety of ways, but they stressed the economic advantages and the fact that Oakland needed more and better parks to compete with other Pacific Coast cities for immigrants. An editorial in the Oakland Tribune summed up many of the reasons Oaklanders had come to think favorably of parks:

One of the positive signs that Oakland is preparing to take her position among the great cities of the Pacific Coast is the attention being paid to its external environment. . . . To induce growth and expansion people must be brought from the outside. To bring people from outside there must be attractions. . . . That which affords the most beauty and convenience will be the first to attract notice. . . . Oakland can do what Southern California has accomplished if it will.28

The bonds won a five-to-one majority. Oakland had developed considerably since bond issues had failed in the 1890s, and the passage of the park bonds in 1907 was seen as a matter of civic pride. The Oakland Tribune crowed that “the citizens of Oakland have demonstrated in a signal and practical manner that the spirit of progress dominates the community” and predicted that the bonds would “give Oakland a more beautiful and majestic appearance” that would “stimulate private improvement on a large scale.”29 Similarly, Mott noted with approval shortly after the election that “every municipality with any pretention at all in these days is giving much thought and money” to civic improvements. Parks, he thought, were “essential” to help “install us in the front rank of American municipalities.”30 The Chamber of Commerce asserted that “the Public Park System of Oakland, as at present outlined, is destined to make the city famous.”31 In an open letter to Oaklanders, Robinson also applauded the passage of the park bonds. “Apart from the aesthetic gain to the city,” he claimed,
parks "will so improve the value of adjacent and neighboring property that in the consequent rise in assessment values, they will quickly pay for themselves."

Oakland continued to develop its parks over the next few years, though the city never went as far as Robinson had desired. In 1908 Oaklanders approved an additional $125,000 in park bonds, mainly to improve Lake Merritt. A year later they voted to amend their city charter to create the park commission that Robinson had proposed. A separate commission had been set up the previous year to develop playgrounds to help boys and girls grow into "strong healthy manhood or womanhood" by providing places where they could "meet with other children and indulge in the teamwork and tribal spirit that results from the playing of games." By 1915 Oakland possessed thirteen municipal playgrounds and twenty-seven schoolyard playgrounds where "athletics, games, plays, dancing . . . pageants and festivals" took place.

From these beginnings with parks, Mott and his supporters moved on to other civic improvements. In his second inaugural address in 1907 Mott called upon Oaklanders to unite in a spirit of "municipal pride, patriotism and loyalty" to continue improving their city. Mott had the strong support of business organizations, most notably the Chamber of Commerce and the Santa Fe Improvement Association, a group of business leaders organized in 1907 to press for municipal improvements.

Most importantly, Mott called for the construction of a new city hall. Civic pride continued to motivate him and his business supporters. Calling Oakland's present structure "unsafe" and "totally inadequate," Mott thought that "with the present growth and standing of our city it is in addition a serious reflection on us." At Mott's urging, Oakland residents approved $1.15 million in bonds for a new city hall in 1909. Designed by a New York architectural firm, the structure was to thrust upward eighteen stories as a skyscraper near the site for a civic center suggested in Robinson's plan. Revolutionary in design for its time, the city hall was, Mott noted with approval, "out of the ordinary and conventional style" and would "attract notice everywhere and will put Oakland in the front ranks of modern cities." President William Howard Taft laid the cornerstone in 1911 after a delay that had been prompted by the Oakland Tribune to protest the employment of eastern architects. City hall was completed three years later.
The Oakland Civic Auditorium helped prepare the city for the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition. From the Hegemann Plan for Oakland and Berkeley.

Following their approval of the city hall bonds, Oaklanders voted favorably in 1911 on a $500,000 bond issue to fund the construction of a civic auditorium. Business groups campaigned vigorously for the bonds as being necessary for their city's economic advance. The auditorium was expected to help bring conventions, (many were expected to meet in conjunction with visits to San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition), capital, and businesses to Oakland. More generally, its backers claimed that the auditorium was needed to keep Oakland abreast of its urban rivals and to win acceptance for their city as a leading American metropolis. "If Oakland is to take its place in the ranks of progressive and up-to-date cities it must positively have such a building," the president of the Santa Fe Improvement Association asserted. "If it is desired to attract capital here and increase the population, then must Oakland have an auditorium." The secretary of the Chamber of Commerce came out for the bonds for much the same reasons. The auditorium would be "a good investment" by attracting people to Oakland. Oakland's residents approved the bonds, only to discover over the next three years that cost overruns made it impossible to construct the type of auditorium they desired for $500,000.

As a consequence, the city council returned to the voters in 1914 to request an additional $500,000 to complete the structure.
Once again business groups led the campaign. The Chamber of Commerce organized a Progress and Prosperity Committee as its "militant arm" to work for the bonds; and the committee divided the city into wards, with a business leader in charge of the campaign for the bonds in each ward. Working with Mayor Mott and the councilmen, the businessmen launched a massive educational movement on behalf of the bonds. As in 1911, those favoring the bonds appealed to the civic pride of Oaklanders. "The world is coming this way next year [a reference to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition] and Oakland cannot afford to have a steel structure proclaiming that the city is too poor to put a cover on its ribs," observed one. To leave the auditorium unfinished would, another noted, be "humiliating and discrediting to its citizenship." The economic arguments—that the passage of the auditorium bonds would "make more work and more wages and better business"—were rolled out once again. The bonds won approval by the scant majority of 139 votes out of 23,577 cast (unlike the park bonds and most other bonds, they required only a simple majority). Mayor Mott found the election result "most gratifying." After learning that the bonds had passed, members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Commercial Club "organized a parade, and headed by bands of music, marched through the business streets of the city."

With more limited aims and benefiting from the strong backing of their mayor and city council, planning proponents more fully accomplished their goals in Oakland than did their counterparts in San Francisco. They made considerable progress: a new park system was laid out, a new city hall and a new auditorium were built, and smaller civic improvements were made. Nonetheless, Oaklanders were no more successful than San Franciscans in adopting a truly comprehensive plan for their city, as can be seen in their failure to follow a plan drafted by Werner Hegemann for the development of Berkeley and Oakland.

Hegemann came to the United States in 1912 at the request of the People's Institute of New York "to cooperate with American cities in the promotion of planning projects." Hegemann was already well known as the secretary of the Committee for the Architectural Development of Greater Berlin and as the general secretary of city planning exhibits in Berlin and Düsseldorf. As he traveled through cities of the East Coast and Midwest giving lec-
tures and preparing planning reports, his reputation grew. Soon after his arrival in the East Bay in October 1913, he was invited by the city councils of Oakland and Berkeley to “inspect and report on conditions” in those cities. Published in 1915 under the joint auspices of governmental bodies—the city governments of Oakland and Berkeley, the Civic Art Commission of Berkeley, and the Board of Supervisors of Alameda County—and private business and civic organizations—the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, the Oakland Commercial Club, and the City Club of Berkeley—the Hegemann Plan was quite different from the Robinson Plan for Oakland.49

Hegemann was less interested in aesthetics and more concerned than Robinson with the economic and social conditions in the cities he studied and planned for. “If civic art is the sublime flower that can finally be hoped for,” Hegemann explained, “the necessary roots, stems and leaves must be found in the economic, social, hygienic and recreation life of the communities.”50 Accordingly, most of his plan for Oakland and Berkeley consisted of detailed suggestions for the coordinated development of harbor improvements, changes in railroad routes, and the construction of commercial streets. All of the changes were needed, Hegemann asserted, to allow the East Bay to compete successfully as a center of trade and industry with San Francisco. Beyond those matters, Hegemann called for the creation of complete civic centers in Oakland and Berkeley and the development of a regional park system along the lines put forward by Robinson. Finally, Hegemann urged the building of better housing for the working classes, noting that “the settlement of the problems of housing for the masses of the population in the long run determines the fate of a city, its health, beauty, civic spirit, political texture.”51

While portions of the Hegemann Plan were implemented over the years, the plan never won adoption as a unified, comprehensive guide for the development of the East Bay. In part, that failure was due to World War I, which disrupted planning efforts. It resulted as well from alterations occurring in the city planning movement itself. In 1915 the California legislature passed a City Planning Enabling Act that permitted municipalities to establish city planning commissions. The commissions could advise city governments on changes needed for the development of the cities. The legislation also allowed city councils to zone areas for
Major improvements in traffic flow were part of the Hegemann Plan for Oakland and Berkeley.
residential, commercial, and industrial use. (Los Angeles already possessed zoning ordinances, and a decision of the California Supreme Court upheld their validity in 1913.) Further legislation two years later strengthened the zoning powers of municipalities. Zoning became the vogue across America by the time of World War I. As the urban historian Mellior Scott has observed, at that time “popular interest began to focus on one phase of city planning—zoning to protect single-family residential areas from invasion by factories, stores, and apartment houses.” Zoning differed from the type of planning put forward by Burnham and Robinson. Zoning did not necessarily envision organically unified cities integrated around civic centers, functionally laid-out streets and harbors, and parks and boulevards. In the cities of some states, zoning could proceed before the preparation of any overall city plans. In Wisconsin and Minnesota, for example, zoning districts were established in cities simply upon the petitions of property owners. Many in the nation’s city planning movement deplored the spread of zoning for distracting attention from what they viewed as the real social and economic problems their cities faced. As Frank Backus, a New Yorker who specialized in the legal aspects of city planning, explained in 1914, “So far what we have done along districting lines has been, practically, housing without city planning instead of housing as an element of city planning, so little has districting been a part of the planning of the city as a whole, so little has it been used to aid in the solution of more general city problems.”

In California citywide land use plans—plans setting aside areas for residential, commercial, and industrial use—generally had to accompany the establishment of zoning districts within cities. Nonetheless, the spread of zoning led to a major shift in emphasis in city planning away from comprehensive plans encompassing civic centers, new streets and harbors, and parks and boulevards. It was not that zoning destroyed what had already had been accomplished along those lines, as it was that the growing interest in zoning precluded further elaboration after the war. Zoning proposals tended to be initiated by real estate men interested primarily in protecting their private investments and developments; they were often supported, however, by home owners eager to protect their property values. The embrace of zoning represented something of a turning away from planning as a weapon in the
Werner Hegemann's plan called for much of the East Bay to be developed as a unified geographic region. From the Hegemann Plan for Oakland and Berkeley.

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fight for urban dominance on the Pacific Coast toward the use of city planning as a tool to solve specific, limited urban problems.

Taking their lead from the residents of Los Angeles, Oaklanders adopted a zoning ordinance in 1914. Introduced to the city council by Mayor Mott, the ordinance set up an industrial zone within which manufacturing concerns would be located. As explained by Mott, the ordinance was "aimed at the inclusion of all industries within definite areas for the protection of people who desire their homes to be located far from the annoyances of shops and factories."56

City Planning Begins in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, as in Oakland, one of the original goals of city improvements and planning was the protection of suburban districts for private homes. As we have seen, Los Angeles developed in part as a result of health and real estate booms. Like Oakland, and in contrast to San Francisco, Los Angeles was a residential city of private homes: and the preservation and furtherance of the "rurban" characteristic of the city was one of the aims of many planners. In 1915 a widely distributed pamphlet put out by the Chamber of Commerce observed that "here may be found beautiful rural homes, whose owners are within touch of social life, and enjoy the best features of the city and country combined."57 As Los Angeles entered the twentieth century, however, the commercial and industrial bases that it developed also called for attention. The congestion of the downtown area in particular attracted notice and generated attempts to relieve it.

Parks, which had figured so prominently in the planning movement in Oakland, were of lesser significance in Los Angeles. Some wealthy citizens donated lands to the city for park purposes. The three thousand acres given by Griffith J. Griffith in 1891 became the basis for the city’s outstanding Griffith Park. Perhaps because the city expanded outward rapidly via real estate subdivisions, however, no park movement as intense as Oakland’s materialized. Rather, most residents hoped to find a bit of nature in their own backyards.

Nonetheless, in 1911 a plan to construct a major parkway won
Like Oakland, Los Angeles was a city of bungalows. From the Robinson Plan for Los Angeles.

consideration. It would extend along the Arroyo Seco River from the Angeles National Forest through Pasadena to Los Angeles, where it would join a metropolitan parkway system. In his report on the proposed system, Laurie Cox, the landscape engineer who designed it, argued that the parkway would add to “the health and happiness of the citizens and to the prosperity of the municipality itself.” Moreover, it would help place Los Angeles on par with “Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Washington, Minneapolis, Philadelphia” and other metropolises as a leading American city. Cox presented his report to the Los Angeles Park Commission at a mass meeting presided over by the City Club, a nonpartisan organization pushing for progressive politics. Those at the meeting resolved that the City Club appoint a committee to work with city officials for park improvements, and over the next few years a number of improvements were made. As early as the summer of 1912, the San Francisco Examiner could report with envy that Los Angeles “has been going forward, and at an amazing pace” in the construction of parks. San Franciscans could, the newspaper con-
cluded, “gain a lesson in civic progress” from this “noble’ park plan.”

In the end, Los Angeles’s park and parkway plans were only incompletely implemented. Most disappointing to many park proponents was the failure to turn Wilshire Boulevard within Los Angeles into a parkway. It became, instead, a commercial highway strip. By 1930 the park system of Los Angeles consisted of fifty-three hundred acres and compared favorably in size to those of other Pacific Coast cities. However, as the leading historian of Los Angeles, Robert Fogelson, has concluded, it “fell far short of the planners’ aspirations.”

Rather than originate in a park and boulevard movement, the planning campaign in Los Angeles found its origins in other sources. One was the attempt by leading businessmen and professionals, banded together as the Municipal Art Commission, to work for the beautification of Los Angeles. Another lay in zoning. Los Angeles was one of the first cities in America to adopt citywide zoning codes.

The Robinson Plan for Los Angeles

Beautification and improvement efforts began in 1903 with the establishment of the Municipal Art Commission. Including within its membership the nationally respected architect John Parkinson, the commission both tried to bring about alterations on its own and sought to advise the city government on the need for changes. The commission tried to secure better cleaning and lighting for public streets and sought to influence the design of public buildings. Members of the commission also tried through speeches and publications to popularize the cause of civic improvements. In addition to their actions as members of the Municipal Art Commission, merchants, real estate developers, and bankers labored through their own business organizations to improve their city. From its founding in 1903, the Los Angeles Realty Board worked to clean up vacant lots, limit the height of buildings, and promote public art. In 1905 a group of downtown businessmen sought to donate land valued at $200,000 to the city for a civic center, only to be rebuffed by the city government,
which had not yet decided what shape a center should take or at what site it should be built.\textsuperscript{63}

As it developed, the city planning campaign became associated with the more general progressive reform movement in Los Angeles. "City and regional planning," Fogelson has written, "emerged as an integral part of progressivism in Los Angeles after 1900."\textsuperscript{64} That many of the same people, such as City Club president Meyer Lissner, were active in both progressive politics and city planning is not surprising. City planning shared certain goals with urban progressivism in Los Angeles: the creation of a populace unified by a sense of community, economic growth for the city, and better living conditions for its residents. As it unfolded during nearly two decades in Los Angeles, progressivism came to embrace devices designed to make city politics more efficient and honest by taking political control away from machine politicians. In addition, it endorsed some forms of municipal ownership of public utilities, and the passage of ordinances aimed at closing saloons, ending prostitution, and eliminating racetrack betting.\textsuperscript{65}

The combined efforts of the Municipal Art Commission and the business groups popularized the cause of planning and improvements in Los Angeles. Dana Bartlett, a minister born in Maine who was serving as a clergyman and social worker in Los Angeles, caught well the desires of many involved in the civic improvement movement.\textsuperscript{66} In a book he published in 1907 titled \textit{The Better City}, he observed, "Ugliness has no commercial or ethical value." Rather, a beautiful city would be prosperous and would have a favorable moral impact upon its inhabitants. Bartlett called for the planting of trees to make Los Angeles "a forest city," the building of streets along the natural contours of the land rather than along the design of a gridiron, and the development of parks, including one along the Arroyo Seco River.\textsuperscript{67}

In early 1906, the Municipal Art Commission recommended that Charles Robinson be retained by the city government to "lay out a plan for the beautifying of Los Angeles and the surrounding country." After some further discussion among themselves, members of the commission convinced the city council to hire Robinson in the spring of 1907. With the council's approval, the commission invited Robinson to visit Los Angeles and offer "such suggestions and recommendations for its improvement and beautification as were practicable in the limited time allotted." In the meantime,
the commission solicited and received suggestions on improvements from the mayor, the park commission, the city forester, the Chamber of Commerce, the Real Estate Board, the Architects and Engineers Association, and the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association. Robinson accepted the invitation and came to Los Angeles for three weeks in November 1907. After touring the city with members of the commission and considering the suggestions forwarded to him from other groups, Robinson presented his ideas to a meeting of the Municipal Art Commission in late 1907.68

Like his plan for Oakland, Robinson’s plan for Los Angeles was limited in scope. While he gave consideration to street and transportation improvements, Robinson again dealt mainly with proposals for parks, boulevards, and a civic center. Robinson restricted his efforts in another way as well. He looked only at “those portions of the city in which conditions were most rapidly becoming fixed,” that is, “the business district and all the more thickly settled parts of Los Angeles.”69 Although restricted in those ways, the Robinson Plan was not limited in any financial sense. “I set myself no goal in dollars to be expended,” Robinson noted in the introduction to his plan. “I assumed that Los Angeles was big enough and rich enough, and brave enough and had enough confidence in itself, to do what was necessary and worthwhile.” Robinson did not, however, expect all of his proposals to be implemented at once. “Some of them will stretch over a term of many years,” he thought.70

In looking at the downtown, Robinson found an area that had grown up “in a swift and unsystematic” way, a district that was “jammed and crowded into narrow streets . . . unrelieved by open spaces.” He proposed to remedy the situation partially through the construction of a union railroad station where the Alameda station then stood on Central Avenue. The new station would, Robinson thought, both “impress strangers” through a “dignified and splendid” entrance and relieve traffic congestion in the downtown area.71 To further dignify and open up the downtown, Robinson urged the construction of a civic center, consisting of a post office, county courthouse, city hall, and several smaller structures, at the intersection of Temple, Spring, and Main streets. Open spaces and gardens would separate the buildings. Robinson noted that a private bank was already going up on one of the sites in the area for which he proposed the center but concluded that “it has at least the merit of rising like a warning finger . . . as if to
Charles Robinson’s plan anticipated a new public library and civic center. From the Robinson Plan for Los Angeles.

cautions the citizens of Los Angeles that if they desire to gain big effects and do big things in the building of their city it is not safe to delay the acquisition of the necessary land.” Robinson believed that the civic center would function in part “to dignify and emphasize the historic old Plaza” inherited from Spanish times, which was located just a few blocks away. He lamented that the “quaint little Plaza” was neglected and urged its connection to a large hillside park that he proposed developing nearby.

From his consideration of the downtown, Robinson proceeded to recommend a park and boulevard system. He called for a large Central Park between Fifth and Sixth streets. Here would be located an art gallery and public library on a hill, with buildings whose “white columns showing from below against the blue California sky” would have a “Grecian” effect. Boulevards would spread out to connect parks as “links in the chain” throughout Los Angeles. The boulevards would serve two purposes. They would
be places of rest and repose as “pleasure drives,” and they would be “utilitarian to the extent that they are to furnish convenient and easy access between the various residential sections and between these and the business section.” Figueroa Street, Sunset Boulevard, Occidental Boulevard, Los Feliz Road, Wilshire Boulevard, and a drive along Arroyo Seco all attracted Robinson’s attention as possible parkways.

Robinson also dealt with smaller, less encompassing matters. He proposed better street lighting for the downtown district, the beautification of street intersections and the entrances to tunnels, and the abolition of fences separating private residential lots as a way of making “one park of many . . . for the good of all.” The planting of trees, and improvements to playgrounds and schoolyards “because of the effect on children and through them on homes,” also won Robinson’s support. Robinson especially decried the imposition of “Chicago-like gridiron street systems” on the varied topography of Los Angeles through “the mistaken greed and ignorance of real estate speculators.” Robinson thought that such developers failed to understand that “beautiful winding roads that follow the contour” could both beautify Los Angeles and increase the value of their private real estate holdings, and he called upon city officials “to check the tendency.”

Robinson closed his report by urging the residents of Los Angeles make their city the “‘Paris of America,’” a city with a “gay outdoor life.” It was necessary, Robinson wrote in conclusion, “not to be simply big; but to be beautiful as well.” As did his plan for Oakland, Robinson’s plan for Los Angeles differed considerably from the Burnham Plan for San Francisco. While both Burnham and Robinson were interested in beautification, Burnham was more the engineer. The detailed street designs of the Burnham Plan were for the most part absent in the Robinson Plan for Los Angeles. Nor was there any real attempt to understand the functional relationships between the different elements of a city that lay at the heart of the Burnham Plan.

As in his designs for Oakland, Robinson was conservative in his planning for Los Angeles. Robinson claimed that he planned for “the city as a unit,” but he envisioned few of the major urban changes called for by Burnham for San Francisco or by those who sought to remake Portland and Seattle. Robinson appealed to the civic pride of the residents of Los Angeles in seeking the
Charles Robinson’s plan called for the construction of numerous boulevards. From the Robinson Plan for Los Angeles.
acceptance of his plans there. Only through planning could Los Angeles join cities across the nation as an equal. After noting that St. Paul, St. Louis, Denver, and other cities were preparing for the future through city planning, Robinson concluded that the “time for carrying out the plans rests with the business sense and civic pride of the citizens of Los Angeles.”

Progress on the implementation of Robinson’s plan for Los Angeles was, however, painfully slow. Planning proponents lacked the political push of a Mayor Mott to bring the plan to fruition. Nor was there the sense of urgency that existed in San Francisco after its disaster. The Municipal Art Commission accepted Robinson’s report on Los Angeles enthusiastically and voted immediately to forward the plan to the mayor and city council. There the plan lay. Not until 1909 did the city government appropriate funds to publish and distribute copies of the plan. Only in August 1910 did the city council pass a resolution urging the mayor to appoint a committee to “consider the needs of the City” and to “develop a comprehensive plan whereby Los Angeles may develop her material improvement along artistic as well as practical lines.” The mayor set up a fifteen-member committee a short time later, but, strapped for funds and hurt by political infighting, it accomplished nothing.

In 1911 at the instigation of the harbor commissioner and at the invitation of the city council, Bion Arnold (the same engineer who prepared a transportation plan for San Francisco) drew up a plan for transportation improvements in the Los Angeles region. Meyer Lissner, a member of the Los Angeles Board of Public Utilities, and thus by city ordinance also a member of the Board of Harbor Commissioners, was instrumental in having the report prepared. Designed to allow Los Angeles “to reap the benefit from its harbor which it should receive when the Panama Canal is opened,” the plan encompassed suggestions for a municipal railroad, local street railroads, interurban railroads, and mass transit facilities. Arnold argued forcefully for the economic benefits of his plan. He claimed that “there is nothing that will advertise a city better, affect the value of real estate more widely and leave a more lasting impression on a community than a comprehensive City and District Plan.” However, little came of his efforts. Further abortive attempts to establish city planning commissions took place in 1913 and 1917, but not until 1920 was such a commission set up, then mainly to deal with zoning matters.
The accomplishments of those desiring city planning along the lines of Robinson's ideas for Los Angeles were therefore limited. Parks were created, but only on a piecemeal basis. The city never acquired a park and boulevard system similar to that recommended by Robinson. For years controversies engulfed efforts to construct a civic center, as different groups argued about location, cost, and design. Typical was the failure of a bond issue in 1912 to build a new city hall on Temple Square, near where Robinson had recommended. Though favored by downtown real estate interests, the proposition generated opposition in the form of "conservative business sentiment" that thought that Los Angeles was already heavily bonded for other purposes. The city hall bonds failed to win approval. When voters did finally approve a $7.5 million bond issue to build a civic center in 1922, they chose a compromise site deemed by the historian Fogelson as having serious "aesthetic shortcomings."

Planners proved more successful in winning new supplies of water for their city, thereby allowing its continued expansion. While businessmen led attempts to implement Robinson's plan and were in the forefront of zoning efforts in Los Angeles, city officials spearheaded the drive to acquire water. As accurately portrayed in the movie Chinatown, ex-mayor Fred Eaton and city water engineer William Mulholland secretly purchased water rights for Los Angeles in the Owens River Valley during the early 1900s (a select group of businessmen, probably tipped off about those moves, purchased land at the southern end of the terminus for a projected aqueduct from the Owens River Valley to Los Angeles). Pushed by city officials and backed by most business interests, nearly $25 million in aqueduct bonds won approval from the city's voters. Completed in 1913, the aqueduct amply supplied the water needs of Los Angeles for years; and the city successfully implemented a policy of water-based expansion that increased its size from 43 to 442 square miles between 1906 and 1930. Project funding also greatly increased the debt of city residents, as "Los Angeles deliberately taxed and spent its way to growth." By 1913 city property taxes, on a per capita basis, were the fourth highest in the United States. As funding strained their resources, the residents of Los Angeles demurred for a time from paying for what they viewed as less essential projects such as the civic center.
Los Angeles as a Pioneer in Zoning

Zoning represented another major approach to city improvement and planning. Real estate speculation played an important role in the development of Los Angeles. By 1930 Los Angeles was home to more than 6 percent of the nation's real estate agents, and one-seventh of the city's work force was directly involved in construction and real estate activities.\textsuperscript{89} Real estate men were more important in city planning activities in Los Angeles than in any other Pacific Coast center. Relying first on voluntary measures, they soon turned to zoning ordinances to try to control the shape of their city's growth. In zoning they saw a precise form of planning that was more effective in protecting residential developments than was comprehensive planning, which involved civic centers, parks, and streets. They saw as well a means that they thought was less expensive.

Real estate developers had long used restrictive covenants to protect the value of lots in their subdivisions in Los Angeles, but it was in 1904 that they first succeeded in having the city council pass an ordinance creating a residential district in which some industrial activities were prohibited. While largely ineffective in practice, the ordinance suggested the possibilities of control inherent in land-use zoning.\textsuperscript{90}

In 1908 the residents of Los Angeles replaced their zoning ordinance of four years before with two much more extensive ones. The ordinances are now accepted by many urban historians as the beginning of modern zoning in the United States, preceding the better known New York statute by eight years. While the first of the 1908 ordinances mapped out three large areas in Los Angeles in which most industrial operations would be forbidden, the second ordinance defined the areas in which industries would be allowed. Strongly pushed by the Los Angeles Realty Board as one way to revive temporarily slumping sales in real estate, the ordinances were intended to assure prospective lenders and home purchasers that Los Angeles would be a residential paradise of spacious homes in quiet, clean surroundings.\textsuperscript{91}

Business opposition to the ordinances, especially that of Los Angeles's budding industrialists, limited their effectiveness. Seven
major industrial districts, mainly along the Los Angeles River, were soon set up, with most of the rest of the city zoned for residential use. The zoning survived court tests to provide a model for the spread of zoning to Oakland and some other California cities.92 Within Los Angeles, however, the results of zoning soon disappointed zoning advocates. The problem, from the viewpoint of those favoring the strict enforcement of zoning, was that the city council granted too many exemptions—more than one hundred by 1915, ranging in scope from a single city lot to a large section of the central business district.93

As the number of exemptions grew, some realtors initiated a movement to revise the zoning ordinances. A precipitating factor was the invasion in 1919 of the west side residential neighborhoods of Wilshire and West Lake by a clothing factory. At a meeting in 1920, a coalition of business groups formed to press for stricter zoning: members of the Chamber of Commerce, who were concerned that enough land be set aside for industrial purposes, the Realty Board, whose members wanted to protect residential areas, and members of other business groups. Together they called on the city council to set up a City Planning Commission to reconcile matters. The city council passed an enabling ordinance, and in 1921 the mayor appointed a fifty-one-member City Planning Commission composed of representatives from seventeen business and civic groups.94 One of the first actions the commission took was to devise a new zoning plan based on five types of districts: single-family residential, multiple-family residential, commercial, light industrial, and heavy industrial.95

In taking that action, the City Planning Commission thrust Los Angeles back into its position as a “zoning pioneer,” for Los Angeles became America’s first large city to establish a separate category for single-family residences.96 The goal the Realty Board had of preserving Los Angeles as a residential city was, nonetheless, only partly met. The growth of the city continued to outstrip efforts to control it. Only small parts of the city were actually zoned for single-family residential use. Moreover, zoning exemptions continued to be made. Throughout the 1920s, the City Planning Commission spent more than 80 percent of its time processing applications for zoning changes or exemptions, and most requests won approval. The only partial success of the Realty Board is not surprising. Its two hundred members in 1921 were only part of the
real estate profession in Los Angeles. More speculative developers and builders opposed zoning restrictions. Then too other business groups did not fully embrace strict zoning. As they had in San Francisco, divisions among businessmen hindered the development of city planning—in this case in the form of zoning—in Los Angeles.97

The City Planning Commission did, however, prepare the way for future planning efforts in Los Angeles. In 1923 some of its members participated in the formation of the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission, one of the first regional planning bodies established in the United States. Two years later, the City Planning Commission was itself changed into a smaller, adequately funded body with heightened political clout.98 According to its director, the commission was designed to be “a coordinating medium through which all agencies . . . which contribute to the physical development of the community shall be focussed in a single attack upon the task of building a city of tomorrow.”99

Brave words those. As in times past, however, population and spatial growth continued to outpace planning efforts. The rapid adoption of the automobile combined with a land boom in the 1920s to thwart attempts to control the city’s decentralized expansion. Then too the residents of Los Angeles, for the most part, wanted that type of growth. The suburban bungalow with its own yard remained the ideal. Not surprisingly, a 1925 proposal to spend $133 million on public transit facilities, including twenty-six miles of subway lines and eighty-five miles of elevated tracks, got nowhere.100 In 1949 an urban planner could still lament, “Is it unreasonable to expect that some planning agency representing the entire Los Angeles area should be preparing a master plan for the future development of the whole area?”101

The California Harbor Controversy

Even as they grappled with the issues of parks, streets, and civic centers, the business leaders of Oakland and Los Angeles worked through politics to improve their harbors. In these endeavors they were joined by their counterparts in San Francisco.
Efforts to improve harbors were often a part of the general planning work of the cities—as they were, as well, in Seattle and Portland. Although they were not included in Robinson’s plans for Oakland and Los Angeles, many planning advocates saw better harbor facilities as a necessary component of comprehensive city planning. Planning proponents envisioned better harbor facilities connected to improved intracity street and transportation systems as a way of making more efficient the economic workings of their cities. Proponents, especially merchants and shippers, thought improved harbors would bring prosperity to them and their cities. They believed the improvements would also win national recognition for their cities and move them ahead of their urban rivals on the Pacific Coast.

Planning advocates viewed harbor improvements as especially important in light of the imminent completion of the Panama Canal. Only if their cities were well prepared, could they take advantage of the tremendous increase in trade and immigration they were sure would result from the opening of the canal. As the completion of the Panama Canal neared, rivalry intensified for the ocean trade passing through California; and that rivalry led to a spate of harbor improvements.

San Pedro, which landlocked Los Angeles annexed as its outlet to the ocean in 1908, possessed only an unprotected roadstead. In addition to the physical problem of constructing a harbor, there was the obstacle of the Southern Pacific Railroad. That corporation, which had brought prosperity to Los Angeles with one hand, threatened to throttle it by its control over the harbor at San Pedro with the other. In a twenty-year contest involving lengthy court battles and lobbying in the state and national legislatures, the Southern Pacific attempted to maintain its hold over Los Angeles’s outlet to the sea. In 1911, however, the California State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the city and against the railroad that the tidelands were state property. Meanwhile, construction of an artificial harbor had been started by Los Angeles, and in 1910 an outer breakwater had been completed. The future of Los Angeles seemed assured, for all that remained to be done for the city to possess its own harbor was to transfer the title to the tidelands from the state to the city.102

Oakland faced an analogous situation. In 1910 court decisions and political actions led by Mayor Mott broke the control that
Southern Pacific had long held over that city’s waterfront, and the city’s residents readily approved bond issues for harbor improvements. In 1911 a leading San Francisco newspaper enviously called Oaklanders’ actions “a bold stroke that seems to partake almost of egotism” and urged San Francisco merchants to emulate their fellows across the bay.103 As in the case of Los Angeles, all that remained to be done was to pass ownership of the tidelands from the state to the city.104

San Francisco merchants viewed the development of rival harbors at Los Angeles and Oakland with alarm and, like other Pacific Coast businessmen, hoped to improve their harbor to prepare for the opening of the Panama Canal. As one advocate of harbor improvements lamented in 1911, San Francisco’s facilities “are inadequate to handle the commerce of the port.” He warned, “Unless San Francisco sees fit during the next four years to provide additional dockage facilities, the vast trade of the Panama Canal will have to go elsewhere.”105 As another explained, “All seaports are competitors with all other seaports on the same coast.” Noting that “Los Angeles and Oakland have adopted the policy of taxation” to pay for harbor improvements, he urged San Franciscans to do the same.106

Making any changes to the San Francisco waterfront was complicated, however, because a State Board of Harbor Commissioners appointed by the governor controlled the port. Moreover, bond issues for the improvement of San Francisco’s harbor had to win approval from the state legislature and then gain a majority in a statewide referendum. When San Francisco had been the only major port in California, this system had worked fairly well; but, as other ports rose to prominence, San Franciscans complained that state regulation hurt them. San Franciscans feared that they might lose control of the board and recognized as well that, as time went on, they would have less and less control over the passage of bond issues essential to their port’s development.107

The contest for California’s ocean traffic exploded in the 1911 state legislative session. When representatives from Los Angeles and Oakland introduced a bill transferring the state-held tidelands to their cities, San Franciscans rallied as a unit in opposition, believing that, should the measure pass, Oakland and Los Angeles might set port charges lower than their own. The deadlock was resolved in a private meeting between representatives of the Los
Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the business organizations of San Francisco. San Franciscans agreed to withdraw their opposition in return for pledges of support on future bond issues for improvements to their harbor and for backing San Francisco as the site for a world’s fair in 1915. Several days after the conference, members of San Francisco’s merchant bodies wired their city’s political representatives in Sacramento to vote for the tidelands measure, and it passed without dissent. Nonetheless, the compromise worried San Francisco merchants, and with good reason.\textsuperscript{108}

Even as the political situation remained uncertain, merchants in Oakland and Los Angeles worked with city officials to improve their cities’ harbors. In Los Angeles five bond elections between 1909 and 1932 raised $30 million to improve the city’s harbor (the bonds won a needed two-thirds vote in each election). The funds financed the building of breakwaters, wharves, piers, docks, bridges and highways—all designed, as the Harbor Bond Campaign Committee of 1919 put it, to “make Los Angeles one of the great seats of world commerce.”\textsuperscript{109} Oaklanders, led by Mott, similarly approved bond issues to improve their harbor. Their activities proved successful. Within little more than a decade, Los Angeles handled the most freight tonnage of any Pacific Coast port and was third (after New York and Philadelphia) in terms of freight tonnage nationally.\textsuperscript{110} Oakland was not far behind, rapidly overhauling San Francisco.

While the goal of comprehensive city planning encompassing parks, civic centers, new streets, and improved harbors was imperfectly realized in Oakland and Los Angeles, the results of their early planning efforts were, nonetheless, substantial. Oaklanders probably accomplished the most, in part because their goals were more modest than in Los Angeles, at least initially. Even more importantly, those supporting civic improvements and planning received strong, steadfast political support from their city’s businessman mayor, Frank Mott. Then, too, Oakland’s growth slowed a bit after 1910, giving residents a chance to catch up with and control their city’s expansion—in marked contrast to the continuing very rapid growth in Los Angeles. Nonetheless, achievements in Los Angeles were meaningful, especially in realms of harbor construction and the acquisition of new water supplies—items that nearly all Los Angeles residents could agree were absolutely necessary for their city’s future growth.