

New documentary series highlights Richmond and Bay Area's sustainable city planning



Zoning and green-tech jobs are a part of the sustainable city planning process that Torres highlights in her documentary series, "The New Metropolis".

By: [Wendi Jonassen](#) | February 9, 2012 – 7:32 am

Ohio-based filmmaker Andres Torres showed highlights Saturday at the Rialto in El Cerrito from a documentary series that she's finishing that focuses in part on County Supervisor John Gioia. The series, "The New Metropolis," covers the history of city planning, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

"What's going in Richmond is very critical in the Bay Area," Torres said about her reasons for looking at the region in the later portions of her documentary.

Torres focused on Gioia because of his work with the state's greenhouse gas reduction legislation, SB 375, which passed in 2008. The law sets a series of goals for emissions reduction in the Bay Area by 2020 and 2035, which would be met by regional cooperation, transit-oriented development, and environmentally conscious city planning. It also emphasizes cultivating jobs in the green-tech arena.

Richmond can specifically concentrate on projects like [Cybertran](#) to help with the regional coordination of sustainable transportation, said City Councilmember Jeff Ritterman, who attended and led a discussion group following the screening.

While the [Lawrence Berkeley National Lab](#) will promise green tech jobs in Richmond, Ritterman said he fears the city isn't providing enough science education to ensure that those jobs will go to Richmond residents.

"One thing we would like to put into place is a center for learning the skills that would be important in the 21st century—green tech skills—and having a partnership with LBNL," Ritterman said.

The first segment that Torres aired of "The New Metropolis" focused on the growth and eventual abandonment of suburban towns as cities continued to slowly sprawl outward. Once a suburban city is abandoned, there are few resources to maintain the infrastructure, and things began to fall apart, while suburban cities farther away are being built from the ground-up.

Torres argues that cities need to invest in the existing infrastructure in some older communities. She focused on a neighborhood in a small town in New Jersey, and also emphasized that racial segregation can happen when suburban communities grow old.

Torres has been traveling the country to screen her documentary, and trying to stir up a conversation about intelligent city planning. She had been to more than 100 cities before she came to the East Bay.

The screening drew such a large crowd that at 10 on a Saturday morning the theater had to open another screen before it was eventually forced to start denying people entrance. “The crowd tells us that we have something to build on in the community,” Ritterman said.

A few public officials, including state Assemblymember Nancy Skinner and state Senator Mark DeSaulnier, were there to watch and speak about Bay Area cooperation and SB 375.

A community discussion at a nearby Vietnamese restaurant followed the screening, and was divided by topics including economic opportunities, food and water, affordable housing, transportation justice, and other more specific community concerns.

“What really needs to happen is that the films trigger dialogue, but the on-the-ground work has to be done in the community,” Torres said.

The next episode in her documentary series is still a work in progress. In the meantime, check out the [website](#) for details on the first two episodes.

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