

A LIVABLE BERKELEY WHITE PAPER

The Third Wave of Environmentalism: *Supporting a More Effective Environmental Coalition in Berkeley*

Since the days of John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt, we have seen the successive rise of three waves of environmental activism, each new one building on what has gone before. In that time we have learned of the need to conserve our natural heritage, to minimize and defeat the forces of environmental damage and destruction, and most recently to take on collective responsibility both for restoring what has been lost and for sustainably creating what is needed.

We might also call these three environmental waves “generations,” since each first came to public prominence about a human generation apart: in the late 1800s, in the mid 1900s, and now in the early 2000s. But none of these generations is more important than the others or makes the others unnecessary – all three now work together as a complete environmental movement.

In Berkeley today, unfortunately, some of our current land-use policy conflicts are occurring between committed environmentalists with different generational agendas -- not between environmentalists and their traditional adversaries. Livable Berkeley believes that if these generations learn to work better together, we can restore a more unified environmental movement for the benefit of our city and region. This white paper describes the opportunities we see.

The First Wave: Conservation

Starting in the 19th century, environmentalists worked to identify, protect and extend those parts of our land that needed to be kept intact for future generations and for our current civic health. They worked mainly with governments, and via NGOs such as the Nature Conservancy, to establish the parks, refuges and preserves we treasure today. Over time the vision of this first wave has expanded from saving single sites in isolation to protecting entire functioning ecosystems – a goal which remains a significant challenge.

The first generation of environmentalists has called themselves “conservationists.” The goal has been KEEP WHAT WE HAVE.

The Second Wave: Environmental Activism

Starting mainly in the 20th century, many environmentalists became political activists, publicly identifying the ever-more-obvious sources of environmental degradation and working with both governments and the private sector to minimize and curb the damage. Their work has produced regulatory authorities such as the Environmental Protection

Agency and legislation such as the Endangered Species Act and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Through lawsuits and direct action they have also helped to stop or reverse specific activities damaging key environmental assets. Their work did not supplant the need for conservation, but has very helpfully supplemented it.

The second generation of environmentalists has called themselves “environmental activists.” The goal has been STOP THE DAMAGE AND DESTRUCTION.

The Third Wave: Restoration and Co-Creation

The 21st century is witness to a rising third wave of environmentalists: people who realize that we need both to repair and remediate damage begun in the past and also to help build sustainable systems and communities for the future. Their most salient driving issue is global warming – a looming environmental catastrophe to which we *all* have contributed to some degree. This third wave is broad in its scope, ranging from urgent global and national action to a focus on more localized environmental threats, opportunities and actions.

This third wave understands that companies and governments still bear major responsibility for allowing environmental damage to continue, but also that we *collectively* need to mend our ways and contribute to personal and political solutions to environmental challenges. “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

The main focus of work that supplements but doesn’t replace second-wave environmental activism is local action to *create and build* positive solutions, not just to curb the damage. These solutions must be crafted within a sustainable model and oriented primarily towards enduring community benefits rather than transient private profit. Improved and efficient infrastructure and more compact and more community-oriented development have been explicit working goals of this third wave.

The third generation of environmentalists might now call themselves “environmental co-creators.” The goal we have recently defined is FIX WHAT WE BROKE AND BUILD SUSTAINABLY.

Three Generations in Berkeley

We can see a recent change in the composition of the overall environmental movement in Berkeley as the third generation becomes more active and more self-aware.

More and more active environmentalists in Berkeley are not from the conservation end of the spectrum but are green planners, builders, technologists and engineers. They are committed to community sustainability rather than just to private profit as an organizing principle, and they are not interested solely in opposing irresponsible companies and unresponsive government entities.

Instead, they believe that sustainability has to be deliberately integrated into all aspects of our community. It can’t just be “conserved,” and we can’t expect that change-of-heart governments and corporations will make enough of a difference. The whole economic system we live in is not sustainable, so it needs to evolve.

We therefore need to construct part of the sustainable future ourselves, not wait for others to do it for us. This is the heart of the third wave of the environmental movement— in Berkeley as well as across this nation and globe.

A Generation Gap

Despite the need to work together, in Berkeley we are experiencing conflict *between* different waves of active environmentalists. Some second-wave activists are skeptical of the benefits of local sustainable-development projects, fearing these are only developer smokescreens or corporate “greenwashing” tactics. Some third-wave Berkeley activists see environmental opponents of greater urban density to be indiscriminately opposed to any change or development. On the recent taskforce to draft a new Downtown Plan, for example, some first-wave and second-wave environmentalists led the arguments against allowing greater density or any tall buildings in the down-town core; while some third-wave environmentalists focused on opportunities to build with little expressed concern about the motives of the large entities that would be required to construct taller or denser buildings downtown.

Needless to say, this generation gap has been counterproductive. It has lead committed environmentalists to fight each other rather than work together, and it is one root cause of the deep incivility that has marked many recent debates.

Measure G and Common Goals

Measure G, passed by 81% of Berkeley voters in 2006, establishes a goal to reduce greenhouse gases in the City of Berkeley by 80% before 2050. It is Berkeley’s first explicit approval of both second-wave and third-wave principles and goals. While requiring deep reduction of greenhouse gases from traditional polluting sources, it also favors a more dense urban environment in targeted locations, much-improved transit service and a citywide alternative energy infrastructure.

Measure G’s guiding framework may now make more possible the ending of some environmentalist debates over development-related city policies and decisions. If we collectively need to “fix what we broke” in terms of regional land use and city zoning, then our third-wave “planners, engineers, technologists and builders” (in the broadest sense) are not the enemy but instead are one important means by which environmentalism gets done. So while second-wave environmentalism still has essential anti-damage battles to fight and win, in Berkeley we can make common cause by also building what we need, with the help of third-wave leadership and technical expertise.

Livable Berkeley’s Commitment

Livable Berkeley is committed to the greater success of third-wave environmental principles and outcomes in Berkeley and the Bay Area. While we often join our environmental colleagues in supporting conservation opportunities and in fighting to eliminate the causes of environmental degradation, we focus primarily on helping other citizens understand how to improve our community through active restoration and sustainable co-creation activities.

We emphasize that Livable Berkeley's focus on third-wave issues does NOT entitle us to any position of moral or political superiority. All three environmental approaches are equally valid – and are equally needed today. Recognizing the strength of a broad-based environmental coalition, Livable Berkeley works with environmental colleagues of all generations to evolve our current civic policies and programs into more sustainable locally-based alternatives.