



Gail Snyder

Global Hot Flashes

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You, too, can iron your shirt with sunlight.

Ken Hughes' Blueprint for Santa Fe

FREEING OUR DEPENDENCE ON FOSSIL FUELS

The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.

— *Rachel Carson, 1954, author of The Silent Spring*

When confronted with the increasingly alarming results of global warming right here in New Mexico, Santa Fean Ken Hughes, like his fellow environmentalists before him, is cautiously optimistic. Active in both the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Sierra Club's Livable Communities Committee, as well as being chair of New Mexico's Conservation and Transportation committees, a 2001 Fellow at the University of Miami's Knight Program in Community Building, and (his day job) a planner for the state Department of Finance and Administration, Ken was frustrated by the Bush administration's lack of honesty about the results of our skyrocketing dependence on fossil fuels.

"State and local levels that usually can rely on some support from Washington on salient issues are left out in the heat on this one," he laments. But unfortunately, at this point, with or without guidelines from the federal government, we just don't have time to wait around, wringing our hands. "I've adopted two kids," Ken goes on, "I ride my bike to work, I live in a solar home [at the Commons, a cohousing community on West Alameda], I'm a vegetarian — but that's not good enough." So, a year ago, Ken brainstormed his essay presentation "A Blueprint for Santa Fe."

There are lots of relatively easy, inexpensive ways we can begin to bring our carbon dioxide levels back to what they were circa 1990, according to the experts, but Ken's Blueprint is not an examination of those things. Rather, it's an attempt to bite the bullet, taking an untrammelled look at the whole big nasty, gnarly picture to see what we can do about it. Underlying the Blueprint's entire focus is this novel concept that global warming is actually the mother of invention, giving Santa Feans the impetus to make some enormous changes while we still have the chance. In it, Ken addresses our community's basic human needs — water, mobility, energy, food and what he refers to as "conversation," meaning ways we can connect with each other — with some radical ideas to make Santa Fe *truly* the City Different, à la such prized destinations as Amsterdam, Florence and Barcelona, all of which have morphed out of their former car-centric, smog-producing selves. And Ken believes we can, too.

DE-EMPHASIZING THE ALMIGHTY CAR

In his Blueprint, Ken starts with the obvious: our more-often-than-not gridlocked main arteries, St. Francis Drive, Cerrillos Road, St. Michael's Drive and the like — which now are just "car sewers, frankly," in his opinion. He recommends we eliminate one lane from each side of these thoroughfares, then widen the sidewalks, put in electric-run trolley lines, add bike lanes, and replace the traffic lights with circular roundabouts, or "*redondos*," as he prefers to call them. These control traffic

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by requiring cars to yield rather than stop at a light, thus requiring no electricity as well as providing a 50- to 90-percent reduction in car accidents.

“Name each *redondo* after Santa Fe Living Treasures who have passed on,” he continues, “such as Father Miguel Baca, a motorcycle-riding Franciscan who provided gifts to poor kids and helped restore the Picuris Pueblo church, and Hazel Parcells, an alternative-nutrition guru. Grace each *redondo* with sculptures of the Treasures, designed by Santa Fe artists and constructed by local artisans and apprentices.” His Blueprint encourages pedestrian traffic with crosswalks, fountains, benches and café tables, creating local gathering places in ways the downtown Plaza once provided.

Ken’s ideas explode off the page: Beef up the bus line. Expedite train service to Albuquerque. Finish paving the bike trails along the rail line, the river, the *arroyos*. Place bike racks all around the city; encourage employers to have a fleet of them instead of cars for citywide errands, meetings and the like. Create a rent-a-bike program, similar to the wildly successful one recently instituted in Lyon, France, which signed up 15,000 subscribers in its first three months, most of whom ride only short distances, all on bikes from public racks.

Essentially, the Blueprint for Santa Fe proposes that we go back not simply to the Kyoto Proposal’s 1990 emissions levels, but all the way back to the days just prior to Henry Ford, before towns and cities became geared for cars, and start from there. Imagine Santa Fe with no strip malls. No drive-up banks, package stores or fast-food joints. No massive networks of asphalted roads and highways, no football-field-sized parking lots, no isolated islands of subdivisions, no dependence on food trucked in from thousands of miles away.

Whoa, Nelly! What would we have instead? In his Blueprint, Ken envisions pockets of neighborhoods all through the city, each with a discernible center — a plaza or a green — complete with a transit stop, an elementary school within walking distance, small playgrounds and parks, with a connected network of narrow, tree-shaded streets to slow traffic and encourage pedestrians and bicycles. Each of these neighborhood pockets would be accessible to the others by trolley and bike trails. At the edge of each neighborhood there would be locally owned shops and workplaces (and/or transit stations leading to workplaces) of sufficiently varied types to supply the weekly needs of a household.

As for the wasteland of commercial “development” all along our major artery streets, Ken envisions taking a typical big-box parking lot, leaving the space in the middle open but replacing the ocean of parked cars with pedestrian and foot traffic, and then densely lining the periphery with three-story structures, the bottom floor consisting of shops, the second floor of offices, and apartments on top. He suggests leasing out a community space in each of our public libraries to a coffeehouse, which would lure in nonlibrary patrons while creating a place for the lively exchange of ideas, discussion and debate. “While we’re at it,” he continues, “let’s return the Santa Fe Plaza to its citizens. Block off vehicular traffic from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Allow sidewalk cafés to come out onto San Francisco Street. Allow strolling musicians.”

REINVENTING OUR FOOD AND WATER APPETITES

As an extension of Santa Fe’s less-is-more reconfiguration when it comes to cars, Ken believes we can also shake our dependence on food grown thousands of miles away. What we need, he contends, is the creation of an urban boundary around Santa Fe on annexed lands along 599 and I-25, with acres of greenhouses, community garden space and “food-forest” areas (a permaculture term describing a planted space of many different crops growing in multiple layers, as in the “stories” of a forest, the opposite of conventional monocrop methods). “This area can act as a greenbelt around Santa Fe, as well as a brake on greed-driven sprawl,” says Ken. Concentrating on organic-food production, he explains, is not only healthier, it also directly affects global warming because organic systems use about one-third less fossil-fuel energy than conventional corn/soybean cropping systems.

In the Blueprint, Ken describes, as a demonstration model, a super-water-efficient greenhouse created by a LANL scientist that currently grows organic alfalfa using rainwater and reclaimed water instead of flood-irrigated fields, thus utilizing 99 percent less water. Along with food grown by organic farmers in Santa Fe County, the northern pueblos, Española, Estancia and Mora, the greenhouses would provide food for the Santa Fe County public schools, Meals on Wheels, Kitchen Angels, other local social-service agencies who work with those in need, and interested local master chefs.

And with the stated goal of no net increase in citywide water use, Ken advises we resurrect the *acequia* networks, let the Santa Fe River flow again, and put storm water to use in parks, golf courses and community gardens. He also advocates building multistory parking garages that would harvest rainwater, as well as establishing a washing machine swap-out program similar to Santa Fe’s recent toilet-swap, in which Santa Feans could trade in their older washers for newer, more water-efficient models.

ESTABLISHING RENEWABLE-ENERGY SOURCES

With local food production and water use made more sustainable, Ken’s next logical focus is on citywide alternative sources for energy. “Sunlight falling on New Mexico could provide 34 times more energy than is currently used in the entire country,” Ken reports in the Blueprint. “Just 10,000 acres devoted to photovoltaic cell arrays would power New Mexico’s electricity needs,” as well as create an estimated 71,000 new jobs.

According to Ken, we can obtain 100 percent of Santa Fe’s electricity needs from renewable energy resources in a number of relatively simple ways. Taking advantage of combined federal and state solar tax credits, for example, could cover over one-half of the capital costs. We could then conceivably devote 25 percent of Santa Fe’s roofs and carports to covering all our city buildings’ hot-water, heating and electricity needs. “Set up a program to install solar collectors on 200 roofs per year, or 1,000 roofs by 2011,” he adds in the Blueprint. “Buy wind-, biomass- and solar-generated electricity. Apply new building standards, such as requiring passive solar in all new construction and using overhangs and light-colored roofs to keep houses cooler in the summer. By planting deciduous trees on the south and southwest sides of homes and conifers on the north and northeast sides, natural shade and wind protection are provided.”

All of this, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg. Covering over 40 pages, the Blueprint contains far more information and resources than can be discussed in depth here. As a means of evaluating the viability of his own suggested solutions, Ken concludes his essay with a series of tests. There’s the Tricycle Test, which considers how well a place supports its children’s means of independent exploration. Then there’s the Popsicle Test, addressing how accessible a place is for meeting our daily needs when we’re traveling on foot or by bike. The Elder Test focuses on whether or not our seniors are able to be actively engaged in the community despite limited mobility, while the Collective Memory Test, measuring how successfully a place

records and celebrates its history, helps the individuals connect with something larger than themselves. And, last but not least, is the Smooch Test, “because romance is important in life, which is why we need places of the heart, from a great vista of the mountains and desert, to a kiss-and-ride spot at a rail station. ”

Does the Blueprint for Santa Fe ultimately pass Ken’s tests? You can judge that for yourself by downloading a copy, complete with charts and illustrations, at [http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/campaigns/urban issues/flows1.html](http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/campaigns/urban%20issues/flows1.html).

“What we need is the will and, most importantly, the imagination [to become sustainable],” Ken concludes. “I would think a community as enlightened as Santa Fe could be compelled to be among the first to react [to the signs of global warming] and to become even a *zero*-emissions community. That’s where the Cool Cities Campaign takes over. . . .”

Next month: Learn about the Cool Cities Campaign in Santa Fe.