



There are some signs in the wind that the American system is working. I refer to the American system of checks and balances, free discussion, arriving at a consensus, all that good stuff you learned in your high school civics class.

For years the builders had their way in this area, planned for the immediate need, housing, and the immediate profit. This led to disasters like Manor Drive, Westview housing, etc.

One thing is certain. If there had been an environmental impact report on Manor Drive, it would not have been built.

WITH SUCH examples, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. A combination of people, ranging from those concerned sincerely with the environmental impact of housing to those sincerely concerned with their selfish goal of keeping out those who did not meet their "high" standards, cut the amount of available housing and increased its costs.

Environmentalism became fashionable. In the process there were sincere people who judged any project by one criteria: Will it lead to increased traffic, or increased population? If it would, they were against

it. With this kind of thinking, 380 freeway would always be out of the question, no matter if it was safer or not, no matter if it was convenient for the current population or not, simply because it might lead indirectly to a population increase and more housing.

As usual with doctrinaire positions, it led to its opposite, to the position expressed best by the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, which has criticized this "lifeboat" ethic: "I'm here, you stay the hell out."

BOTH THE selfish builder, with his singleminded determination to build at any cost, and the extreme environmentalist position, which pays no mind to the needs of people, are too extreme to be right.

I think that the system is working now because some moderate voices are speaking up. Harold Gilliam, the Chronicle's environmental expert, recently reviewed a book by professor Bernard Frieden called "The Environmental Protection Hustle." The surprise is not that Gilliam criticizes some of Frieden's points, but that Gilliam agrees with some. He calls Frieden's book "required reading."

If Harold Gilliam and other open-minded environmentalists can discuss the needs of people as well as ecology, and if the blind greed of some developers can be held in check, perhaps a consensus, a compromise, can be achieved.

IN THE END, people need housing, and jobs, but they also need a pleasant area to live in.

People are part of the environment too. There is nothing more sterile or dreary than architecture without people. I had the misfortune to take a walk around Embarcadero Center on a recent Sunday. Almost the only people there were guards. I think we were better off with the old produce market than with that sterilized, dreary architectural gem.

1-31-79