

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

Spring 2026

A publication of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association



American Planning Association
Connecticut Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

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Planning for People: Designing Public Involvement That Works

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Building CCAPA's Future Together



Planners are, by nature, community builders. Many of us are deeply engaged in the places we call home — whether serving on local boards and commissions, volunteering with nonprofits, or contributing to professional organizations. Through this work, we understand the importance of succession planning and the need to continually cultivate new leaders.

At CCAPA, I'm grateful every time I look around the room at our events and see a mix of familiar, seasoned professionals — those who have shaped this organization into what it is today — and the many new faces who represent the future of our chapter. Some of these emerging planners are already stepping forward, sharing their energy and ideas, and helping CCAPA grow in meaningful ways.

For CCAPA to remain strong, resilient, and relevant in a changing world, we need engagement from planners at every stage of their careers. When established, mid-career, and emerging planners work side by side, we create a powerful and sustainable foundation for the future. I encourage all planners — no matter where you are in your professional journey — to get involved. Together, we can help each other learn, grow, and thrive. I know that I would not be the professional I am today without the mentors I met early on, many of whom I connected with through the APA network.

I also want to acknowledge something we frequently hear from emerging planners: they are sometimes unsure whether involvement in CCAPA counts as part of their professional responsibilities. To those in leadership positions, your support matters. You may be a new planner's first introduction to both the profession and our chapter. By encouraging your staff to participate, attend events, and take on roles within CCAPA and APA National, you open the door to a welcoming network ready to help them develop into the best versions of themselves. If you want to get more involved in CCAPA, reach out to committee chairs and learn about volunteering opportunities and other networking events near you.

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On the cover: Painting by Linda Farmer.

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

is published quarterly by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association. Contributions are encouraged. Submissions must include the name and contact information of the contributor. Material may be edited to conform to space or style requirements. Please address submissions to Executive Editor Jeanne Davies, AICP (contact information below).

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FROM THE EDITOR



There's a lot to unpack in this edition of *Connecticut Planning*, which focuses on public engagement, trust, and a bit of history in that regard. Change is always certain and "the center cannot hold" (*W.B. Yeats*). This edition is long overdue, but it's understandable. CCAPA volunteers

continue to diligently work at their jobs while finding time to support the chapter. For that reason, we have included committee chair overviews to help our readers and members understand the roles of each committee and the work involved. Your involvement is always encouraged and appreciated.

Since the last edition, we lost a founding father in Connecticut planning. Richard "Dick" Erickson passed away late in 2025, quietly, which was indicative of his personality and humility. He was a mentor to so many and to me as I navigated those stressful first couple of years as a new "Planning Director" in East Lyme, a town in his Southeastern Connecticut planning region. His advancements and concepts for improving planning in Connecticut inspired me to strive for similar goals in my career. We also recently lost Linda Farmer, a talented planner and artist who was a one-time president of CAZEO and served as Director of Planning for the Town of Tolland for many years. Please see Laurie Whitten's heartfelt remembrance of her friend and colleague inside.


Thank you to the Weston & Sampson crew for inspiring the content of this edition and for another great article on public engagement; and to our host

of retired planners who contributed insights and set the stage for an article on planning, past, future and the role of technology and trust in Connecticut planning and public engagement.

In the realm of change, we have so many newly appointed and enthused Executive Committee members. Find some time to read about them and the work of your chapter. In particular, one person I'm happy to introduce is Tabitha Wilson, who will be taking over as editor and co-chair of the CCAPA Communications Committee. I will miss working on these editions with Jeff Mills, our seasoned and talented production guru for the magazine. Thank you, Jeff, for all your great work, patience, and sense of humor.

My apologies to Emily Wilson for some errors in her article about GIS in the Fall 2025 issue. Please take a look at the [corrected version](#) (begins on p. 27) and here's to the great work at CLEAR.

After 20-plus years volunteering with CCAPA leadership, I'm refocusing time on new endeavors, including fine art. Studying art for three years in my twenties, I was always fascinated by the painters who depicted landscapes of people in varied settings, and the stories told in those paintings. Today, my paintings that sell most are often a depiction of community interaction within town centers. Someone mentioned at a gallery opening that people really like to see abstract visions of themselves engaging with others. After years of working to improve community engagement within the built environment, this seems to make sense. ■

— Jeanne Davies, AICP 

President's Message, cont'd

As your Chapter President, I am honored to serve and excited to meet both longtime members and those joining us for the first time. Let's continue working together to build great communities for everyone in Connecticut. ■

— Jonathan Reiner, AICP 

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Planning for People: Designing Public Involvement That Works

by *Sristhi Jain, LEED® Green Associate; Joanna Nadeau, AICP; Robert Collins, AICP*

Comprehensive and master plans are meant to be the public's roadmap for their community. Yet our invitations often ask people to leave their real lives at the door. If we want better plans, we must redesign how we ask, where we ask, and what we do with what we find out.

On a wet Tuesday evening, a few older residents trickled into the multipurpose room, glanced at the poster boards, and then slipped out early. Staff had done everything “right.” They promoted the event, developed informative slides, had a sign-in form, and even conducted an online survey, but the room never filled. The low turnout could be attributed to apathy, but it could also be an outreach problem.

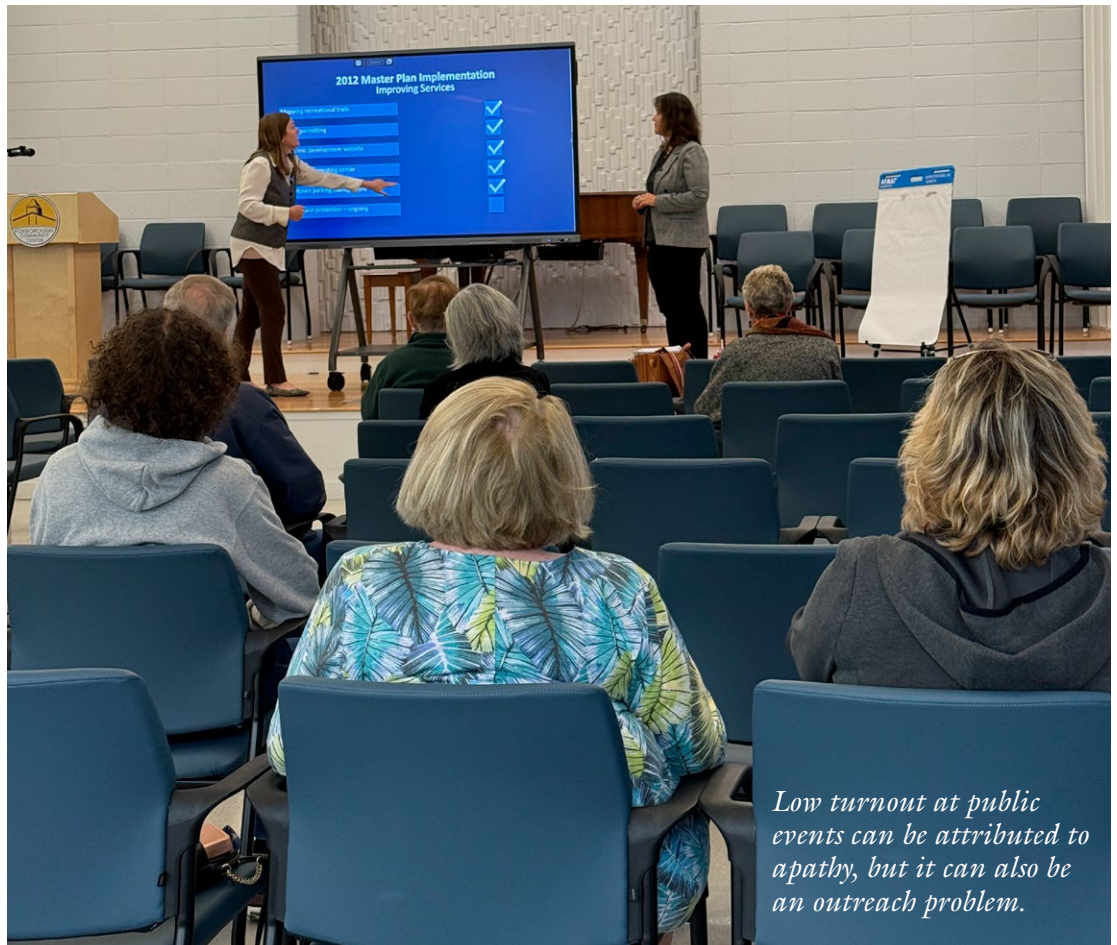
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Real Planning Doesn't Start in Meeting Rooms — It Starts in Real Life

Planning professionals often design public engagement activities as if the public is waiting to be invited. The reality can typically be quite the opposite. With an aging population, the people most likely to attend traditional evening workshops are older adults with stable, predictable schedules. Meanwhile, younger residents like those balancing shift work, college, childcare, or multiple jobs are dramatically under-represented in planning rooms. Their absence is not disinterest; it's incompatibility.

If we keep relying on weeknight meetings and formal sign-ins, we will keep hearing from the same slice of the

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Low turnout at public events can be attributed to apathy, but it can also be an outreach problem.

Planning for People, cont'd

community and then wonder why our plans struggle with long-term relevance. Municipal meetings and land use boards in the United States are attended by 15% or less of residents, and typically older, white, male homeowners. [Centers for Housing Opportunity (2025)¹; Einstein et al. (2018)²; Rolheiser, et al (2020)³; Montalvo (2008)⁴]

So, instead of asking people to rearrange their lives, planners need to do a better job at meeting them where they are. We should treat everyday locales as civic engagement spaces:

- school pickup lines
- senior centers
- grocery store vestibules
- bus stops
- playgrounds
- barber shops
- sports sidelines
- food pantries
- farmers markets

A simple tactic such as a pop-up

display with a single, specific prompt like, “What’s the first thing you’d fix on your street?” reaches parents who cannot stay for an hour, older adults who do not drive at night, or teens who will never click a meeting link. It also changes *how* people respond: the tone is more candid, the ideas more grounded, and the participants more varied.

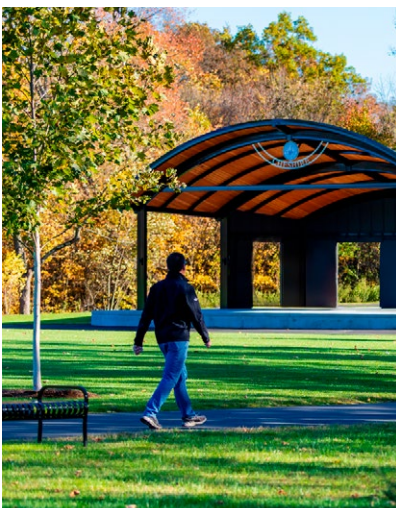
As the age curve shifts, we need more — not fewer — youth voices shaping the places they will inherit. Bringing planning into everyday locations is not a gimmick, it is a demographic necessity. Communities do not exist in conference rooms. Our engagement shouldn’t live there either.

Attention is Scarce — Design for Quick Hits

Traditional engagement tactics assume that if people care, they will give us an hour. The thing is: long workshops and dense surveys reward *free time*, not *interest*. Caregivers, shift workers, students, and younger adults can spare minutes, not evenings — so when participation requires a large block of time, we don’t

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Instead of one heavy ask, try designing a series of small, inviting steps, like a 30-second, one-question poll at a pop-up, for example, or through a QR code.

Most people don't speak in phrases like "activate multimodal corridors" or "enhance resiliency through regulatory alignment," yet those are the sentences that fill our documents and websites.

Planning for People, cont'd

filter commitment, we filter capacity.

Instead of one heavy ask, we need to design a series of small, inviting steps. Begin with a 30-second, one-question poll at a pop-up, for example, or through a QR code. Then, follow up with a five-minute ranking exercise that reports back on previous comments and requires no login and no registration. A final step might be a short online huddle, voice note, or comment wall reacting to what others have said. Each touchpoint lowers the barrier, builds familiarity, and makes participation feel like an ongoing conversation rather than a single appointment that residents must prepare for.

When we break engagement into lighter, more frequent interactions, more people — and more types of people — participate. Ten micro-touchpoints with 100 residents generate richer insight than one evening meeting with the same 15 regulars.

Small tasks also help people enter at their own individual comfort level: parents between errands, teens waiting for a ride, older adults who prefer not to speak publicly, and residents who don't feel "expert enough" for a microphone. Participation becomes a ladder, not a gate —

people can climb as high as they choose and no one is excluded because they can't clear the first rung. Asking less, more often doesn't dilute engagement, it multiplies upon it. This allows communities to learn earlier, adjust sooner, and shape plans in ways that reflect the rhythm of real life, not just the schedules of the few who have the time to stay in the room.

Communicate Clearly, Not Technically

An important item to consider is that residents don't reject planning; they reject feeling talked at. Most people don't speak in phrases like "activate multimodal corridors" or "enhance resiliency through regulatory alignment," yet those are the sentences that fill our documents and websites. Plain language is not dumbing down, it is opening the door. By putting verbs and numbers up front, the meaning lands instantly and can be measured later:

- "Add three safer crossings by December"
- "Plant 200 street trees by next spring"
- "Repaint bike lanes on Main Street this summer"

Specifics create credibility while vague intentions create distance. If a page can't be understood in 30 seconds, for example, that's not a literacy issue, it's an editing issue on our side.

Clear writing also signals respect. When information is direct, people can decide, respond, and act without needing translation. That matters for residents who speak English as a second language, older adults with limited vision, and busy families reading on a phone while making dinner. Short sentences, active voice, and real examples beat dense paragraphs every time. Replace acronyms with full words, swap technical terms for everyday ones, and explain maps with a 50-word "what this means" box. Planning is already complex; communication doesn't have to be. When we write like humans instead of handbooks, more people see themselves in the work — and more people stay engaged.

Write Plans for How People Read

Most plans open with chapters that no one asked for — history, methodology,

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Planning for People, cont'd

legal context, acknowledgments — while the information residents actually came to find sits 100 pages later. Reverse that. Lead with one page that answers the only questions people bring to a plan: *What are we trying to do? What will change near me? When will I see it?*

Start with a single-sentence vision, followed by five short goals written in plain language. Then add a list titled, “This year you’ll see...” with four to six concrete actions tied to real locations, each with a date for the next milestone and an identified owner. That page should stand on its own, work on a phone screen, and make sense without explanation. If someone reads nothing else, they should still understand the direction and the near-term commitments.

After that, move directly to the elements that people search for the most: the future land use map and a short box explaining how it affects housing, height, character, or streets in everyday terms.

No color-key decoding, no jargon, no guessing. People don’t read plans the way planners write them; they skim for what impacts their street, their school, their corner store. When the most useful information comes first, trust increases and frustration fades. Residents come to plans to find themselves, so help them do it fast before they walk out of the room or close the tab.

Follow up Matters

Trust doesn’t come from asking, it comes from responding. Too often, engagement ends when the meeting ends, and residents are left wondering whether their input mattered or whether it disappeared into a report that no one will read. To change that, make the follow-through as visible as the invitation. After each round of input, publish a single, simple panel — online, on social media, in the library, and at the bus stop — that says, “You said...We did...Next you’ll see...” with one clear date. No paragraphs, no jargon, no promises without owners. The

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Planning for People, cont'd

goal is not to recap everything — rather, it's to prove progress.

More than volume, it is consistency that truly matters. Updating the same panel monthly, even if the change is small, signals reliability and honesty. Sometimes the “We did” will be a completed action; sometimes it will be, “We're still working on this and here's why.” Both build more credibility than silence does. When residents see their fingerprints on the work — street by street, milestone by milestone — they return, they bring others, and skepticism becomes participation. Closing the loop is not the end of engagement; it is the engine that keeps it going.

Make Accountability Visible, Not Boring

Accountability usually lives in places that the public never sees — in PDFs, staff spreadsheets, or quarterly reports buried on a website. But when progress is invisible, it feels imaginary and skepticism fills the gap. Rather than routing residents

through another town hall to hear status updates, publish a living checklist that shows what's happening in real time. Keep it simple: one table that captures the status of all actions and next steps in one place with columns for Place, Action, Owner, Funding Path, Start Window, Next Milestone, Metric, Status. Post it online, print it for the library and senior center, and include a QR code on project boards. The goal isn't decoration, it's legibility.

Power lies in consistency and clarity. Update the checklist quarterly, even if the update is small, using only three status words:

1. planned
2. in progress
3. done

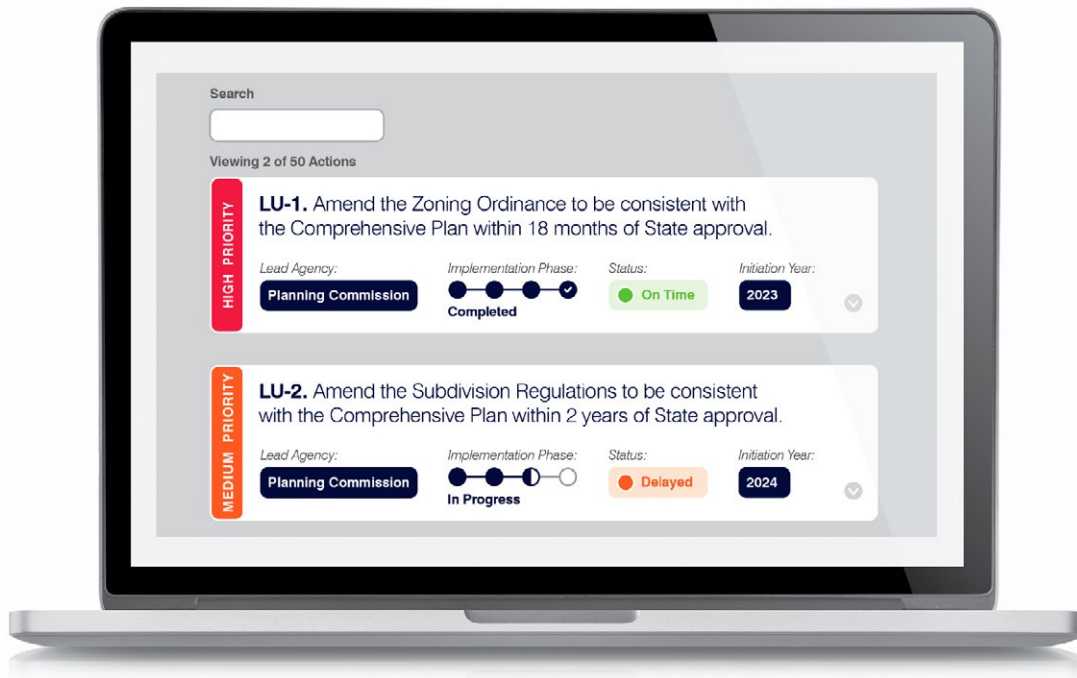
This way residents don't have to decode phrases like “under review” or “pending coordination.” Add dates, not paragraphs. When people can see what moved, what stalled, and why, they stop guessing and start trusting. A visible

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A large blue banner for POCD. On the left, the Horsley Witten Group logo features a circular emblem with a sun, water, and trees, surrounded by the text "HORSLEY WITTEN GROUP Sustainable Environmental Solutions." Below the logo, the text "POCD" is written in large white letters, followed by "Creating a unified plan for the future." and a rounded button containing the URL "horsleywitten.com/planning". To the right of the text are four images: a family with a dog on a beach, a person on a bicycle, a pond with greenery, and a modern multi-story residential building.

Planning for People, cont'd



Rather than routing residents through another town hall to hear status updates, publish a living checklist that shows what's happening in real time.

checklist does what a meeting rarely can: it turns accountability into something shared, not defensive — and it keeps the community engaged long after the workshop ends.

Remove Hidden Barriers

To intentionally reach people that are juggling full lives, we suggest these tactics — none of which are expensive:

- offer two time slots
- rotate days
- choose ADA-accessible, transit-reachable sites
- translate materials
- accept voice notes
- provide a kids' table
- co-host with non-government partners

The Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant Program, for example, established a framework for equitable engagement that requires three methods be used by funded projects to reach impacted communities:

1. print
2. in person
3. virtual (or online)

This multi-channel approach is meant to reach people where they are. Building on that, the MVP program also encourages the use of equitable engagement modifiers — adaptations that respect that everyone comes with a unique life situation. Different native languages, different work schedules, different abilities to access things — internet access, transportation access, or wheelchair access — can all inhibit someone's ability to participate. Other perspectives like caregiving responsibilities or a lack of trust or familiarity with government processes should also be considered as you design your engagement strategy, making sure there is an entry point for each situation.

Measure What Matters

Count outreach results like touchpoints: first-time participants, neighborhood coverage, and languages served as measures of success, not just the number of chairs filled. Share results with your planning team and be prepared to adjust quickly. If the first tactic you use doesn't work, think

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What's going on?!

Stay current with CCAPA happenings! Bookmark our online events page at ct.planning.org/events so you don't miss out!

Planning for People, cont'd

about how to do it differently before the next engagement. If your tactics bring in good numbers but they're the usual participants, it's time to think more creatively.



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¿Cuáles son sus principales prioridades para construir un Chelmsford más fuerte y mejor? Su visión es importante. Las respuestas a la encuesta se recopilarán aquí hasta el 4 de marzo:

<https://tinyurl.com/chelmsfordMVP>



To help reach more people, consider translating materials into a language the local community will better understand.

How this Works — Over the Course of a Project

A good engagement process starts with a conversation — or many — with the community and key organizations. Where are you starting from? Are there already established channels that reach a variety of residents? If those exist, lucky you! Communicate the engagement timeline and strategy and go for it.

If not, start by asking what we know works and doesn't work. Conduct the first engagement somewhere people go and make it open ended to capture what they are thinking. Don't ask people to adapt to your topic right out of the gate.

Once you have some channels identified, offer something short and concrete, maybe online, where they can easily weigh in on something specific. For a third round, offer a workshop or open house to give feedback on the report — what you heard were their priorities, areas of disagreement, and point those out in the invitation.

Open house style workshops with stations and no timed agenda let people

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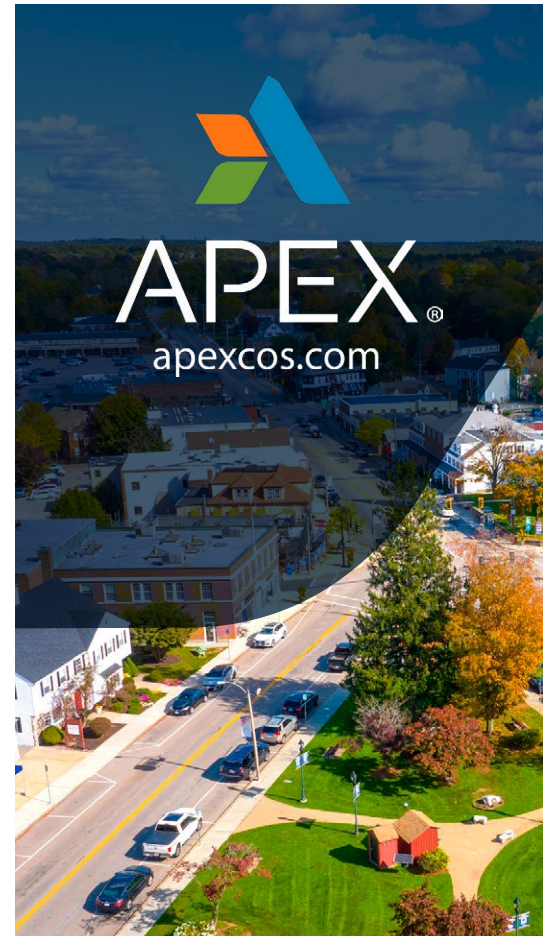
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Planning for People, cont'd

come and go as they please so they don't have to stay the whole time. Set up a rotating presentation deck, feedback boards, and clear voting tools.

The lesson is simple: low turnout isn't a verdict on the community, it's feedback on outreach design. When we bring planning into everyday life, ask for less information more often, and report progress plainly. We don't just fill rooms, we build plans that truly belong to the people they are meant to serve. ■

Endnotes

¹ <https://cho.thehousingcollective.org/impact/participation-local-control-land-use-connecticut>.

² www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/abs/who-participates-in-local-government-evidence-from-meeting-minutes/C6505940E607B6392C4A8F53A9363DB1.

³ <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/nejps/vol12/iss1/3/>.

⁴ www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/l0804en.pdf.

About the Authors



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9:00 - 10:00 A.M.	CCAPA CHAPTER MEETING & UPDATES
10:00 - 11:00 A.M.	ANNUAL LEGAL UPDATE (PLUS Q&A)
11:00 - 11:15 A.M.	BREAK
11:15 A.M. - 12:15 P.M.	LEGISLATIVE FRONT - ISSUES AND TOPICS FROM 2026 CGA SESSION & LOOKING AHEAD
12:15 - 12:45 P.M.	CHAPTER AWARDS CEREMONY
12:45 - 1:30 P.M.	LUNCH (CATERED)
1:30 - 2:30 P.M.	MIDDLE HOUSING - WHAT IS IT, HOW TO REGULATE IT, HOW TO BUILD IT
2:30 - 2:45 P.M.	BREAK
2:45 - 3:45 P.M.	AICP ETHICS SESSION




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Connecticut's Newest Fellows

At its Induction Ceremony on April 26 in Detroit, MI, the AICP College of Fellows welcomed two veteran Connecticut planners to its esteemed ranks. Congratulations, John and David!

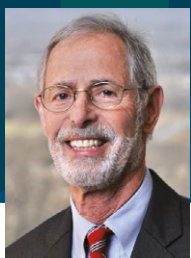


John P. Guskowski, FAICP
From his first planning job, John Guskowski has been dedicated to the idea that every community deserves good planning. He has spent the last two decades working with rural and agricultural towns in Connecticut, transforming planning for agricultural land use and supporting the state's food system. He has been a visionary planning leader, contributing policy guidance to numerous municipalities and raising the profile of planners at the state legislature. John has been a mentor for the state's planning professionals and a long-standing volunteer nonprofit agency leader. He has advanced attainable pathways for communities to address Connecticut's affordable housing crisis.



David M. Kooris, FAICP
David M. Kooris inspires practitioners and community advocates to break out of their silos and take action to achieve outcomes for their communities that balance economic, social, and environmental objectives. Mr. Kooris has focused his career on the New York City metropolitan region and Connecticut in particular. His work has resulted in mixed-income transit-oriented redevelopment, brownfield remediation, waterfront resilience and recapture, renewable energy generation, multi-modal transportation infrastructure, department process improvements, and mentees and students' career advancement. His greatest strength is speaking to diverse audiences to instill integrated, long-range planning as a way of life and not just a profession.

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The Center Cannot Hold: Planning, Public Trust, Technology, and Retirement

by Jeanne Davies, AICP

Recently, a younger friend that works in the planning profession shared that she needed to quickly write an article for a publication for work. She said she was turning to ChatGPT to help write the article.

Fast forward to my own situation: with pressure to get this way-overdue edition of *Connecticut Planning* magazine out for publication, I faced the temptation to try out “artificial intelligence” (AI) with the same goal in mind: the need for speed toward an expedited already delayed publication. But truly how well does AI compile and translate the notes from a discussion of retired planners that was conducted on a snowy February evening, that formed the basis for this article?

For me, personally, after a career of 40 years in this planning profession, call me “old school,” but I cannot conceive a situation where I would write an article using Chat GPT, let alone pay for a \$60/year subscription. On that snowy evening in February, I joined a conclave of retired planners sipping beers and eating pizza, representing many years of diverse experience and expertise in both the governmental and consulting sides of planning. While we didn’t specifically get into the upsides and downside of AI, they might agree that shortcuts are a minefield that will get a planner into sticky situations with his/her/their clientele.

So, this article is a slow deep dive, a languorous swim into whether the discussion of retired planners can provide insight to navigating the emerging problems of public trust and tumultuous change presented by technology.

Technology and Public Trust

An article in this edition on p. 4 by planners at Weston & Sampson addresses the issue of relevant public engagement — meeting the residents where they are in their life and the use of creative and timely outreach to hear feedback on a plan or project. This article reviews the concept of public engagement and building or eroding trust.

This article is a slow deep dive, a languorous swim into whether the discussion of retired planners can provide insight to navigating the emerging problems of public trust and tumultuous change presented by technology.

Early in my career, I worked in a town with two independent villages that were seemingly separated by much more than the five miles between them would suggest. Both were quite old and preceded the incorporation of the town, and had unique and sometimes conflicting cultural aspects. On a common plan for the town, they could not create a unified vision. So we got clever. The Economic Commission chair (who was slightly put off by this new young planner) put aside her reservations and invited me to tea for a conversation. The chairman, Catherine Irwin, was an elderly Irish immigrant of impeccable manners

and worldly experience. She owned an upscale clothing shop in town and was a marketing whiz, including a career in national marketing with *Reader’s Digest* magazine. What ensued with a year of patient planning was a very successful, first-of-its-kind in Connecticut workshop, facilitated by Yale Design School. The charrette brought the villages and town together for a full weekend of very well attended public engagement and building trust. There was also food. Food or proximity of food is a big deal with people.

Today, the buzz sphere is replete with dire predictions for the future of humanity with tech moguls’ conglomerative seeking domination over interactions. What the tech moguls and AI are not doing is building public engagement and trust. They also don’t provide refreshments.

So many of our planners are knee deep in the day-to-day interactive work of site plan reviews, applications, budget meetings, and late-night commission meetings, the specter of AI may not really be on their radar. They are the front lines of trust-building in our towns and cities. They are ones, during public engagement, who are listening. Elected officials come and go. Our mayor may be at the National Mayor’s Conference learning about how AI is a solution for cost-cutting efficiency and staff reductions, but will they come back and fully appreciate the role of their town planner in getting to the trusted solutions? Will the elected officials decide planners should be replaced by AI?

That aforementioned group of retired planners on that cold night talked about what is important in the

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The Center Cannot Hold, cont'd

planning profession. Their respect for the younger generation of planners in the pipeline was repeated often. As author, I wondered if younger readers would be interested in the thoughts of a small group of retired or semi-retired planners. Some of them started their careers with slide rules. Is there something to learn from reminiscent reflections of retired planners to understand the ever-emerging potential minefield of algorithmic intelligence? Before connecting the dots, I dug into research about Artificial Intelligence, government officials, and public trust in both.

Summary of Research into Emerging Technology, Government and Public Trust

■ Artificial Intelligence, Planners and the Future

Artificial Intelligence is here, mining our data, disenfranchising

communications between business and clients or between friends and neighbors, lining pockets of investors, yet offering creative, sometime lifesaving solutions, necessary short-cuts to speed up mindless bureaucratic systems. The larger question is whether we are invested and do we trust the new paradigm?

■ AI and the Planning Profession

In 2025 the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy published a podcast and article outlining emerging trends in planning, including AI, in which the authors summarized the role of planners, the current pace of change, and ever-present challenges of artificial intelligence to job security:

“Urban planners want to try to figure out what’s coming in the future, just like everybody else. But it might be said that those in the planning profession have a special obligation to be alert to all the different scenarios they can possibly anticipate, given that so

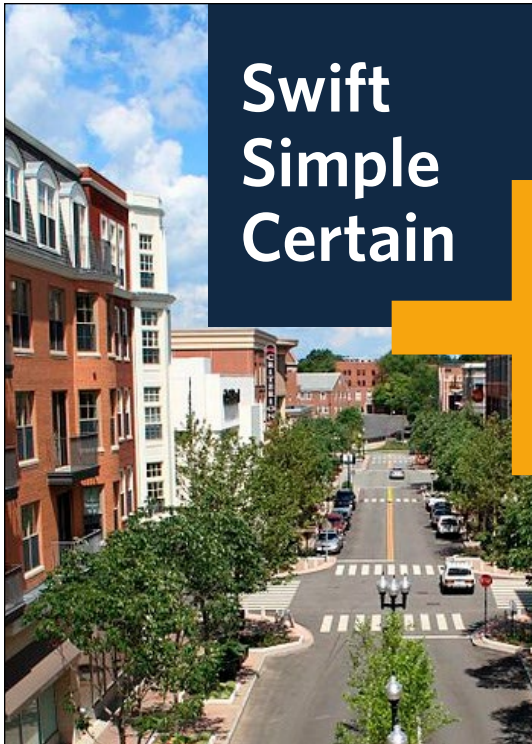
much of what they do is to...well, plan ahead.

The pace of change has been especially dizzying recently, as artificial intelligence, social media, and other related technological advances continue to transform fields of practice and the day-to-day functioning of communities across the world.

‘People fear that they might get replaced by AI, because it seems to be developing so fast,’ said Petra Hurtado, APA’s chief foresight and knowledge officer, who shared key take-aways from the Trend Report on the latest episode of the Land Matters podcast. We will have to upskill and learn more about how these AI tools work, and how we can effectively and also ethically and responsibly use them in our work.”

What came to mind in reading this report was whether planners are still valued — to curate AI generated data, to ensure that it was

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trustworthy, to translate conclusions to the community. Would AI instinctively blend its accumulated algorithmic knowledge of all things geographic, legal, and codified to produce findings for planners that were seminal toward individual needs in specific communities? Or... would there be a tendency toward homogenization of planning theory, specialized zoning codes, and “easy” answers to “get” the job done, yet avoid the specific needs or concerns of the community and its residents?

A larger question that came to mind from reading endless articles, both scientific and opinion-based: will those residents at workshops and public hearings, and the commissioners in small towns without professional planning staff, trust the answers produced by AI-generated data? Are planners the guardians of public trust in government?

■ Public Engagement and Trust

For a decade or more, trust in one’s own opinion over expertise of engineers, scientists, and government officials has been on the rise with the demise of centralized local newspapers, national news sources, politicization of data, and the upsurging reliance on social media “experts.” Public input at public meetings continues to evolve to meet ever-changing distrust in government and major news media.

- **1995** – *“We think the Commission needs another expert opinion on whether this development will cause harm to the neighborhood.”*
- **2005** – *“I’m not a planner or engineer, but it’s my opinion that this site plan will do serious harm to the neighborhood.”*
- **2015** – *“I believe that the traffic will cause serious accidents in the neighborhood.”*
- **2035** – *“My AI data research predicts that use of the electricity grid and water supply by the proposed data center will have no deleterious impact on the neighborhood. Here’s an AI generated photo of what will happen.”*

Now a new shift in public trust has entered the room. With AI, the potential for distrust increases as the public is not sure if what they are seeing is real or a gift. APA blogger Grant Holub-Moorman reviewed this paradigm in a post:

“Transparency about data sources, data quality, and the potential for bias is crucial for ethical AI use in urban planning. Planners must continually monitor and adjust algorithms to address biases and outcomes as they emerge. In some cases, human-in-the-loop algorithms, which include human intervention or review, could be utilized to maintain control and oversight. The human-in-the-loop paradigm underscores the critical role of human experts in guiding, intervening, and even correcting AI output

and decisions. In short, planners should plan to conduct regular ethical audits and reviews of AI systems to mitigate inherited bias. Urban planners and planning organizations bear the ethical responsibility to institute strict data security measures and be transparent in how they collect and use data. Not only is security an ethical imperative, but it is also a legal requirement in many jurisdictions.”

As I looked further into the concept of public trust in today’s society, a study at George Washington University from 2024 revealed trust is waning from both the public and private sector in government communications and government officials overall:

The study included interviews with over 700 members of three key groups: U.S. adults; communication practitioners from federal, state, and local governments; and practitioners in the private sector. There were several relevant key findings for professional planners as follows:

- *Perception of Government: U.S. adults perceive the government as ineffective, untrustworthy, and driven primarily by political motives. Conversely, communication practitioners within government view it as effective and trustworthy, while those in the private sector align more with the negative outlook of the general public.*


- *Challenges in Communication: Both U.S. adults and communication*
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CCAPA'S HOT TOPICS

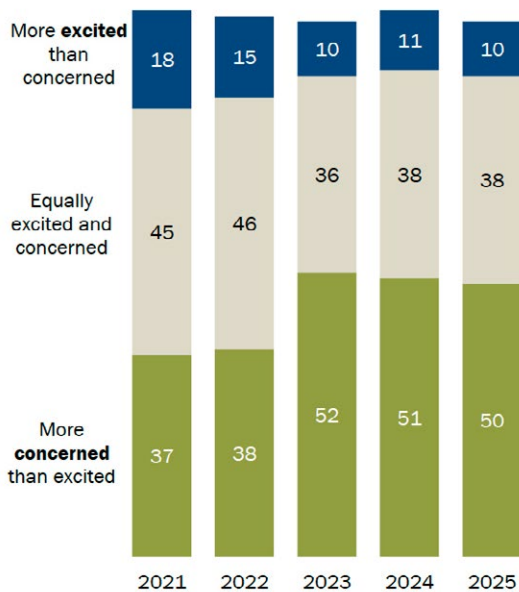
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“On the one hand, common sense tells us that people sometimes can be too trusting — falling prey to scams, for example. And distrust can be a rational response to a life full of hardship. On the other hand, trust is the oil that lubricates the frictions of daily life. Trust makes it easier for people to work together to solve problems. It is beneficial for the economy because it’s related to confidence that other people will respect contracts, repay loans and behave honestly. And higher trust is associated with better-functioning democratic institutions. In short, overall levels of social trust seem to go hand in hand with many features of a healthy society.” — Pew Research Center | May 8, 2025

50% of Americans are more concerned than excited about the increased use of AI in daily life

% of U.S. adults who say the increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in daily life makes them feel ...

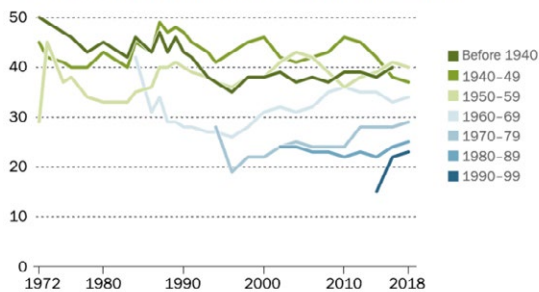


Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 9-15, 2025.
“How Americans View AI and Its Impact on People and Society”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

At all ages, Americans born more recently are less trusting of others than those from earlier decades

% who say that most people can be trusted, by decade of birth

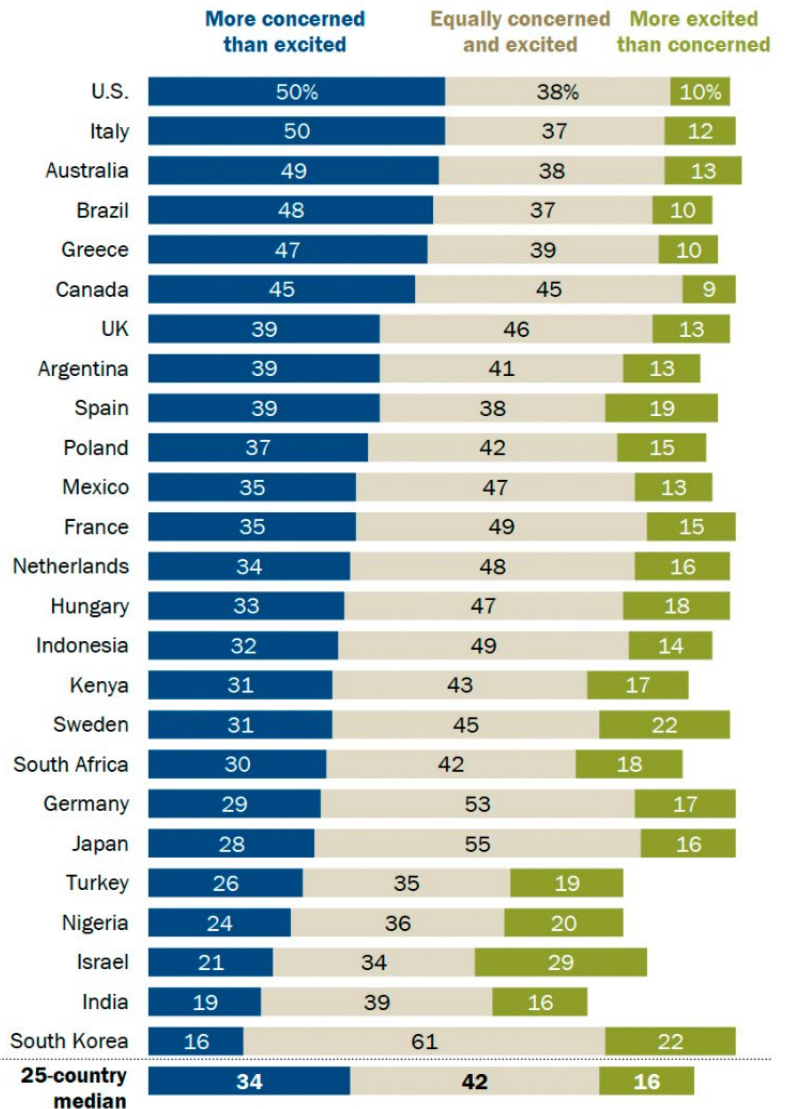


Note: Lines are a rolling average of the three previous datapoints.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of General Social Survey data, 1972-2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

How do people around the world feel about the rise of AI in daily life?

% who say the increased use of artificial intelligence in daily life makes them feel ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Spring 2025 Global Attitudes Survey.

“How People Around the World View AI”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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practitioners recognize misinformation/disinformation and political polarization as significant challenges to public trust in government messaging. However, while U.S. adults cite dishonesty, communication practitioners in both government and the private sector also attribute the lack of trust to executional issues such as timeliness, audience segmentation and messaging clarity.

- **Role of Artificial Intelligence:** *Despite recognizing the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (A.I.), all three groups express opposition to its use in government communications, citing privacy violations and potential for misuse and a further decrease in trust."*

Trust in the Process Through Planning

Public trust builds over time. Planners, who work on optimizing the future and are good facilitators, can fill the role of continuity and

trust building at the local level. With ever-changing elected leadership and political football, trust in the bureaucracy is more critical to public discourse and community-building than ever. But there are speed bumps that the planning profession will need to address; one of which is the perception of elected leaders on the optimization of interaction between the public and the bureaucratic system.

At a recent Conference of Mayors, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu said AI was being used to streamline permitting, so among other things more housing can be built faster and less expensively. Tim Kelly, the mayor of Chattanooga, said the city sought to "reframe AI as a productivity tool that makes our teams' jobs easier." For him, the bottom line is "getting to better solutions, faster."

— 2025 Conference of Mayors

Now...back to the sage wisdom of those retired planners mentioned

earlier...This lively discussion yielded some hindsight and insights to the above concepts of cost-saving, fast-paced technology. It was agreed by all that the same skills we used as city, community, consulting, or regional planners are even more important if not critical to effective government today — the ability to step back, breathe, and objectively listen and understand the public through creative engagement.

One planner said he continues to mentor younger planners with the hope that they will not be lured into expedient judgement. They will see the prism of options rather than black and white. Others noted that the most important tool in a young planner's toolbox is the ability to confidently stand before a crowd of citizens and present facts, information, and figures with humor, grace and style. Simultaneously, they need to let the audience know they are being heard. It is a practice that

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currently lacks support in education and overall training from their observations as mentors.

As to quick answers and data analysis by computer-generated intelligence and technology, the retirees observed that speed and technology is only as good as the person who can translate it. AI and technology may be a valuable tools toward expedient solutions, but ones that still need to be verified and transformed into humanistic language to build trust.

Connecticut case in point: A few years back, an organization evolved toward promoting affordable housing. It tapped into technology and survey work to amalgamate 169 municipal land use regulations and zoning maps in a statewide map to illustrate holes in the fabric of housing affordability in CT. It was lauded as a seminal feat of research quickly produced which would assist in legislation toward affordable housing. Yet, the organization and stakeholders had to still engage with residents, towns, and neighborhoods to build trust and inclusion. What followed was some collective stakeholder success in passing legislation, but messaging was sometimes and may continue to be confusing to the public.

In the case of affordable housing in Connecticut, the retired crew unanimously agreed that “affordable housing” in Connecticut, which has been a legislative issue since the late 1980s, was still a high priority for planners.

After 40 years of communicating or mandating the need for affordable housing, Connecticut’s current leadership and advocacy organizations appear to be on the road to building affordable and hopefully inclusionary solutions at the town level. Yet, to actually zone for and build the affordable units, the process will require trust at the local level toward the “new” affordable housing. Creative

Over the course of the evening, one recurring theme on which the self-described dinosaurs around the table mutually concurred; the ongoing respect and admiration for current working planners who are facing new, potentially insurmountable obstacles, working with youthful optimism to advance the profession of planning.

use of technology, verified data and public engagement with planners at the facilitation table will still be required.

There are fleeting opportunities to build public trust, especially statewide. The process for any major initiative requires slow and steady nonpartisan progress. It goes without saying that planners should be at the forefront of engaging with the public and building trust.

Will future trust-building include more intensive use of AI? While adaptability and a planner’s knowledge base is a critical factor in management of AI, another important discussion could be made on the ongoing role of APA and state chapters toward a coherent accelerated public campaign and social media presence on the role of planners in towns and cities: “Why is your town planner so important to your community?”

In a fast-changing society, it will be a challenge for planners and their support network to fend off the wheels of politically generated hyper-efficiency, to slow down, self-correct, and ensure accurate forecasts.

Further Collective Thoughts

Over the course of the evening, one recurring theme on which the self-described dinosaurs around the table mutually concurred: the ongoing respect and admiration for current working planners who are facing new, potentially insurmountable obstacles, working with youthful optimism to advance the profession of planning. Their brilliant brains can filter and dissect technology, including AI and the promise or problems that may come with this new paradigm. Managing technology and the public engagement process toward creative, ethical, humanistic planning is the high mountain to climb for this new generation of planners.

The consensus around the table was that a singular important element transcends all aspects of society as it relates to the planning profession — that of the broader view, one that is not quickly siloed into parts and pieces or mined for political expediency. In a time of rapid turnover, creative planning for continuity and preservation of the best of planning systems and accountable government is paramount to ensuring “community” trust. The engagement of those people, not the mere planning and permitting of an idealistic, homogenized built environment, is critical for success.

While it was acknowledged that this would be supremely challenging for current and new planners, the retirees around the table, including this author, faced hurdles that are still relevant today. Affordable housing was as large a problem in 1986 as it is 40 years later, and we are no closer to a solution to the problem despite the best of intentions. We have made small inroads into inclusion and equity planning, but there is so much more to be accomplished, and this generation is fully engaged in that planning arena. Planners still need to be valued by elected officials and the public to be effective. Gaining trust is a critical first step

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The Center Cannot Hold, cont'd

if any public process is expected to succeed.

What the group valued in our lives as professional planners was our ability to take the time needed to research and effectively communicate to persuade elected officials and the community to think critically about land use and the future of their town. No matter what the input, a good planning process takes a year or more. An impactful planned infrastructure project easily may take six years or more.

While elected officials come and go with the seasons, land use staff and planners are the bastion of continuity for positive future outcomes, and the public should be alert to the value of planning staff. All of us agreed that we fulfilled various roles in our careers with the goal toward improved community planning, and hoped that the new generation recognizes the need for adaptability. A singular skill of planners is the ability to chameleon ourselves into whatever role is assigned to us to get the planning done.

Some further sentiments expressed by the group:

- Their ongoing belief in navigating the political and bureaucratic mindsets to advance the overall goals of the community.
- The fun of engaging with the public and managing planning projects despite the never-ending abyss of budget negotiations and ongoing political change.
- Frustration in the inability of Connecticut to institute statewide long-range planning in a realm of 169 individual town governments. Inroads have been made, but there is still so much Connecticut can do to advance public trust of future-focused planning while respecting home rule.
- Even with regional consolidation, planning takes a back seat to political mindsets of cost savings.

- Planning is sometimes a lonely and isolating profession in small and midsize towns as well as cities.

It was agreed that planners are not particularly good at marketing themselves; it's not in our DNA and it's not in the course work or AICP study materials. We are facilitators, mediators, the objective arbitrators in the room. Our professional leadership needs to take a stronger advocacy role, even if that means hiring staff to do it for us. Goals for the chapter might be listed as:

- More events in which elected officials and the public are invited to celebrate planners' accomplishments.
- Programs and workshops which support connection and mental health for planners as well as skill-building in public trust and wise use of technology, especially in the management of AI.
- Public engagement and speaker training.

APA and CCAPA should take a proactive strategic leadership role (aka *Start with Planning*) to build a public awareness campaign on the importance of professional planners in building public trust and navigating the future of our communities. Planners are the leaders in the room who can facilitate continuity and create public trust, which is paramount to public discourse, livable com-



We are facilitators, mediators, the objective arbitrators in the room. Our professional leadership needs to take a stronger advocacy role, even if that means hiring staff to do it for us.

munities, thriving economies, and democracy. 🗳️

Resources

www.lincolnst.edu/podcasts/land-matters/from-ai-to-future-work-trends-planning

<https://cps.gwu.edu/government-communications-study-reveals-critical-insights-building-public-trust>

www.usmayors.org/programs/ai-playbook

www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/03/12/key-findings-about-how-americans-view-artificial-intelligence

www.pewresearch.org/2025/05/08/americans-trust-in-one-another

www.planning.org/blog/9306489/ethics-of-ai-enhanced-planning

— *Jeanne Davies, AICP, a former Executive Director of the Lower CT River Valley COG and Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development, has over 35 years experience in community planning and administration. She is outgoing co-chair of the CCAPA Communications Committee, sidling into an evolving career in consulting and fine art.*

Musings of Self-Professed Dinosaurs

As part of formalizing a conversation held in February, a few survey questions were sent to retired planners. The adage that you're never busier than when you retire was more than true as many emailed retired planners were either still working part-time or on to other pursuits. A few answered the questions to help frame this content of this article (see *The Center Cannot Hold*, beginning on p.14).

The answers from Mark Oefinger (MO), Michael Murphy (MM), Jeff Taebel (JT), Mark Pellegrini (MP), Craig Minor (CM), and Jeanne Davies (JD) are varied as follows, but the responses expressed in the survey are also indicative of the many sentiments expressed by the group of retired planners at the February gathering.

Why stay involved as a retired planner in APA/CCAPA?:

"I felt I needed to stay active at a high, but part-time, level and I keep a Life membership with AICP/APA and have been working on projects ranging from plan review, POCD development, AHP development, Brownfields grants, and LOTCIP transportation grants to assist the Town." **MM**

"I may have strong opinions about various issues/topics etc but at the end of the day I'm a process person. Most decisions are not either absolutely right or wrong...but how outcomes are determined are critical. In retirement what motivates me is a desire to share whatever process knowledge I have with groups / organizations that I am involved in...I find that critical thinking is sorely missing in many public discussions." **MO**

"I've been involved with APA since graduate school and have served in a variety of roles at the section, chapter, and national levels. Over time, I've come to appreciate that APA's greatest strength is its engaged membership, especially at the grassroots level. Staying involved is my way of giving back to an organization that has played a meaningful role in my professional development and from which I've gained so much." **JT**

"There's process of diminishing returns once you retire as regards

professional development which needs continual reassessment of your value to the profession and conversely its value to you. I've enjoyed the transition into retirement and the ability to contribute with some of the free time available to me." **JD**

"Being a town planner was a big part of my life, and who I am. This keeps me in touch with that. Motivation? To not look silly...I hate it when my friends are aware of a CT planning issue or controversy that I hadn't heard about." **CM**

"I've been away from CT for a little over five years and except for an occasional LinkedIn piece or news article I'm pretty much out of touch. I got to Long Beach in the Fall of 2019 and soon afterwards COVID hit. Between having zero network here and jobs migrating to online work, conferences canceled and me enjoying the Southern California climate etc., I eventually gave up my APA and AICP memberships. I follow planning events as a spectator and not a player now." **MP**

Have your views on the planning profession changed since you retired? If so, for better or worse and why? :

"The role of a part-time planning consultant helps you step back a bit from the daily political and organizational grind of heading a large

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Our Panelists:



Mark R. Oefinger, AICP
Retired Groton
Town Manager



Michael J. Murphy, AICP
Former Director of
Planning and
Development,
Town of Groton



Jeff Taebel, FAICP
Retired Director of
Community and
Environmental Planning,
Houston-Galveston
Area Council



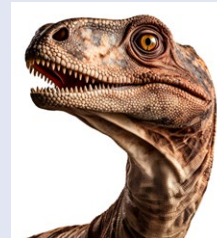
Mark Pellegrini, AICP
Former Director
of Planning &
Economic Development,
Town of
Manchester



Craig Minor, AICP
Former Newington
Town Planner and
Cromwell Town
Planner



Jeanne Davies, AICP
Former Executive
Director, Lower
CT River Valley
COG & CT Resource
Conservation and
Development



Plateosaurus
Town of Triassic

Musings, cont'd

department. I can focus more on planning aspects of the job, which is a pleasant aspect. I still remain discouraged at the lack of understanding of the planning and regulatory process on the part of some of the public and commission members." **MM**

"I'm not sure my views have changed much in retirement, only a greater realization that many organizations don't want to put the time and effort in to engage their constituents. Many decision-makers think that speaking the loudest means they have the correct answer. Folks need to listen more before they decide on a direction to follow. It seems to me that in my formative years as a planner, people were more willing to listen to others."

MO

"Nope. I continue to believe in the value and importance of the planning profession in striving with others to make great communities and places for everyone to live in. Planners should be the voices that ask hard questions, bring different perspectives to the table, look for different ways to do things, weigh the relative benefits and efficacy of them, and try to balance competing interests and values. We are seldom decision-makers and cannot control all outcomes, but we try to be a moral and ethical voice and stand for those who have no or little opportunity or advantage, and for doing the best right thing."

MP

"In hindsight, I'm more aware of how much some of my most meaningful professional accomplishments depended on timing — and, at times, a bit of luck. That perspective has reinforced my belief that planners may only have a limited number of opportunities over the course of a career to make a truly lasting impact. When those moments arise, it's essential that we recognize them and are prepared to step forward." **JT**

"In 1990, I left my first planning job in CT to see the big planning world (Smart Growth) working for the City of Seattle Land Use Department, which was lovely. Over three years in my first job, I had been frustrated at the lack of support for planners. When I returned, I found little had changed, except an evolving support system provided by RPOs, especially the Southeastern Regional Planning Agency, soon to be SECOG. As chair of the SCRRA's Recycling Committee and member of SeCter's finance committee, I developed an appreciation of how a regional approach could be the solution to planning in CT. I migrated into regional planning for 15 years. If the newly minted COG's can prioritize planning, there still may be hope for planning in CT." **JD**

What were the singular issues of importance in your planning career? Were they resolved over your tenure? Is there more to do?

"Contentious budget cycles, ensuring scarce federal money for critical projects was well managed; 13 years from concept planning, public engagement, to overseeing construction and finishing a \$6 million two-phase Mystic Streets project. Housing access continues to stand out as an ongoing issue. We see the single-family zoning that is rampant with many commissions who will not focus on the need for diversity in housing in any meaningful way. Planners can only do so much. It requires decisions by people who on the commissions to solve the problem." **MM**

"Economic development and diversification! I started my planning career working in the Governor's office in Rhode Island. At the time the state was reeling from the departure of the Navy in the mid 1970s and was trying to figure out how best to move forward in an effort to recover from the economic blow / impact of the Navy's departure. The decision to shutter the Navy facilities was a federal unilateral

decision, there was no public process, no opportunity for the state/communities to provide input. Ironically, EB decided to purchase a major facility at Quonset Davisville that was abandoned by the Navy. Fast forward to the late 1970s, I was offered a planning position in Groton, where EB and SUBASE were located. For the next 35-plus years as a Groton planner and then as Town Manager, much of our efforts dealt with EB and the SUBASE and the need to not only maintain those facilities but to diversify / grow our economy. These efforts were centered around the so-called "peace" dividend of the 1980s and multiple Base Realignment (BRAC) efforts that confronted the community and region. Ironically (again!) we are still overly dependent on defense spending and need to continue to grow / diversify our local and regional economies." **MO**

"The most compelling issue throughout my career was advancing the creation of mixed-use, walkable places across a wide range of contexts. The challenges were — and remain — substantial, with many obstacles and countervailing forces that were not resolved during my tenure. That said, I hope my work helped build momentum and lay groundwork for those who follow." **JT**

"Housing (what kind, where, how much, who can afford it, what does it look like), economic development (what kinds of industry, business, jobs, what kind of wages, what kind of revenue generation, what kind of incentives to get it, where to put it), and the environment (clean air and water, preservation and conservation of which land, healthy homes and neighborhoods, climate change adaptability and resiliency). Have they been resolved? No. But we have, until recently, been on the right track even if progress has been grudgingly slow.

"One of the wonderful things about the profession is our projects, cities

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Musings, cont'd

and towns and people, are never "finished" and the singular issues are never fully resolved. (What would we need planners for then?) They change constantly, requiring constant attention and vigilance. Every planner's career will have its share of hard-fought victories, defeats, and draws. Important decisions will take too long. Opportunities will be missed. There will be plenty of ribbon cuttings and celebrations and happy people with plenty of room for improvement. That's the fun part." **MP**

"Oh to pick a singular one: convince the East Lyme public that a boardwalk on the river and harbor would bring economic revitalization to the town; unifying the two villages in East Lyme to build a common planned sustainable economic vision: open space protection of Oswegatchie Hills; building the Estuary Transit into a regional public transit system from what was

perceived as a senior citizen bus service; planning and scripting a documentary on Affordable Farming and the scourge of invasive Hydrilla in the CT River. As Mike and Mark noted...A planning project can take a long time to resolve. The singular issue was managing the first consolidation of two planning regions (MPOs) in the country, let alone CT, into a COG. It was resolved before I left the region, but there was major burnout, the tragic demise of our Executive Director Linda Krause, and there is still so much more to do in the planning realm. COGs as well as planning are still for the most part invisible to the public." **JD**

"1. LOL — affordable housing. Still very much as controversial and complicated as ever. The difference today vs. 30 years ago is: the rest of CT gets it. Everyone now acknowledges that it's a huge problem. 2. What we used to call "urban sprawl," and its partial remedy — "cluster housing." I wonder if planners even have a term for it

have anymore, since it's become so common." **CM**

What remains as the most important current land use issues that could improve the lives of people going into the future?

Housing, especially affordable housing. Climate and the environment, with clean energy, air, and water delivered as public goods. Jobs and the economy, with appropriate supports including health care, education, and living wages. **MP**


"Housing and economic opportunities and diversity for all." **MO**

"Affordable Housing." **JT**

"A sustainable codified relationship between conservation (nature) and the built environment (planning is not all "urban")...And attainable housing!" **JD**

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Original Perspective Breaks Through

Musings, cont'd

"Affordable housing. It touches everything." **CM**

What is a singular achievement for planning in Connecticut between 1980 and 2010?

"The implementation of the CT Coastal Management Act which helped a small state like ours, given the environmental issues that had been developing in Long Island Sound. This has also spurred much of the stormwater and LID regulation that has been so important." **MM**

"I can't speak for the entire State but in SE CT acceptance of regional planning/cooperation has increased. Towns seem to be willing to work together to achieve things that they can't do and/or don't want to do on their own. Some of the realization that regional cooperation is the way to go is in part a direct result of the Defense Downsizing / BRAC battles from the late 1980s to mid 2000s and the realization that we are all working in a regional context." **MO**

"Geographic Information System advancement. When I started in planning, GIS was a blip of confusion in the minds of town workers, still something on a geography graduate student would be enthused about. The ability of the regions to work with OPM, coordinated aerial flyovers, reconciled parcel discrepancies across the regions and state, over the last 20 years was a huge advancement for CT. We can see what's on the ground and can do analysis. Still so much that can be accomplished, but so happy to see GIS in play and accessible to the public." **JD**

"Making people aware of the perils of unaffordable housing." **CM**

What particular regret do you have for planning in Connecticut?

"Given the loss of county government structure, that regional government has not been able to bridge the planning gap and have the teeth to deal with the home rule issue." **MM**

The 2013 regional consolidation. Planning in CT became an annotation to the larger concept of regional shared services. The statute that empowered regions to consolidate sublimated former regional planning commissions into an advisory committee to the COG. It was a hasty and ill-advised moment in planning history within Connecticut and many of our selectmen were of the same thought at the time. Fortunately, there are terrific planners in our new regions and the federal government (FHWA) places significant emphasis on planning and the MPOs in regions are mandated to consider land use scenario planning prior to making transportation improvement decisions." **JD**

"None, really. Maybe that we weren't able to do more to make CT a better place to live." **CM**

Do you still feel like you can contribute to planning in Connecticut and how?

"Absolutely. A small town can really benefit from the experience of a city and town planner that has worked in a complex governmental system and community like the Town and City of Groton, and small cities everywhere. I worked out west as a city/regional planner in Cheyenne and Laramie County in Wyoming, have experience in private sector marketing and real estate site selection in NYC and New England, and as a city and town planner in Connecticut for 45 years. Someone still needs planners like me and the rest of us!" **MM**

"Yes, I hope so. I'm still involved in a number of organizations concerning economic development, housing,

utilities, tourism, and the arts. My training as a planner is hopefully an asset when it come to making some of the decisions that these organizations make." **MO**

"Taking a short break from volunteering locally in planning to focus on moving water and paint around a piece of paper depicting people in their built environment and also following the work of new voices in planning at CCAPA and APA via workshops, conference, and periodicals." **JD**

"I know I can, but I also know that I don't make as much of an effort to do so as I should. I keep up on planning-related bills in the legislature and comment on them to my local legislators. I try to review the monthly local P&Z agenda and contact the Town Planner on applications that catch my eye. And I stop in to talk with her occasionally." **CM**

"I agree wholeheartedly. Raaaaaawr!" **Plateosaurus 🦖**

Employment Opportunities

<https://ct.planning.org/jobs/posts>

Town of Westbrook Zoning Enforcement Officer

Town of Westbrook | *Westbrook, CT*

Transportation Planner

Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments | *Bridgeport, CT*

Regional Housing Planner

South Central Regional Council of Governments | *North Haven, CT*

Floor Recovery & Water Resource Specialist

Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board | *Corning, NY*

Environmental Planner / Senior Planner

Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board | *Corning, NY*

CT Career Trainee / Planning Analyst

CT Office of Policy and Management | *Hartford, CT*

In Memoriam — Richard B. Erickson, FAICP

by James S. Butler, AICP, Retired SECOG Executive Director

October 1, 2025 — It is with deep sadness that I recently received the news of the passing of Dick Erickson at age 93. Dick was more than my predecessor as Executive Director of the COG; he was one of my first bosses in planning, a mentor, a role model, an inspiration, and a friend. He positively influenced a generation of planners and other municipal officials and was affectionately referred to as “the godfather of planning” in southeastern Connecticut.

Richard B. Erickson graduated from Clark University with both a Bachelor and Master degree in Geography. In between earning those degrees, he served in the Intelligence branch of the U.S. Army. His first planning job was as an Assistant Planner in Cape May County, N.J. In October 1961, Erickson was appointed the first Executive Director of the fledgling Southeastern CT Regional Planning Agency (SCRPA).

At the time of Dick’s arrival in southeastern CT, only two municipalities in the region employed full-time planners and many towns had not yet adopted zoning. The concept of regionalism was still new and somewhat foreign to local elected leaders, but a sagging economy and lack of governmental funding provided fertile ground for Erickson and the SCRPA to sell the idea of towns working together for a common cause. When Dick started at SCRPA he was the only employee of the 13-town regional agency. He quickly became successful in obtaining state and federal funding, gradually hired staff, and additional towns in the region joined the regional agency; however, there was still a sense of home rule first in the region and throughout the state. In a column published in *The Day* newspaper upon his retirement in 1998, the writer noted that Erickson was not one to “rock the boat” and quoted him as



Jim Butler and Dick Erickson SECOG Dedication

saying “I was born in New England, and keenly aware that hometown prerogatives were dear to the hearts of everyone. This thought tempered my expectations”. His results surely exceeded those expectations as he was instrumental in the formation of numerous regional agencies and institutions including the Southeastern CT Water Authority, the Southeast Area Transit, the regional Tourism District, the Southeastern CT Regional Resource Recovery Authority, and the Area Agency on Aging among others.

In the late 1980s, with collapse of the Soviet Union, the region’s defense-oriented economy was threatened as the federal government announced plans to close the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, United Nuclear Corporation in Montville was shuttered, and the future of Electric Boat and the SUBASE was in jeopardy. Erickson and SCRPA played an important role in reacting quickly to these threats to the region’s economic health, convincing the region’s

(continued next page)

Memories of Richard B. Erickson, FAICP

“I have many fond memories of Dick Erickson, beginning with... when I first arrived in Groton in the late '70s and traveling up to Boswell St. in Norwich; thru the various BRAC battles; the transition from SCRPA to the COG; the creation of C.RED and other regional initiatives and approaches; and up to Dick’s retirement and beyond. Dick was a true professional and gentleman and someone I greatly admired and respected. When Dick spoke, people listened!”

— Mark R. Oefinger, AICP,
Retired Groton Town Manager

“Dick was acting as the planner for the City of New London when I first moved down here. What I do remember is that he was the consummate professional planner. He dealt with some difficult situations, and people, in a calm and reasoned manner, providing professional guidance at a time when it was badly needed. He will be missed.”

— Bruce Hyde, Retired UConn
Land Use Educator

“Good luck trying to find a photo or information about Dick Erickson, FAICP on the World Wide Web. He was from a period of professional planners who made amazing contributions to Connecticut planning yet are less known once they retire or pass away. Dick was my first mentor in planning, giving deep insights on how to thrive as a planner in a somewhat charged up political environment. He was humble, so kind and incredibly gifted as a planner and quiet effective leader.”

— Jeanne Davies, AICP, Former
Executive Director, Lower CT
River Valley COG and CT
Resource Conservation and
Development

In Memoriam, cont'd

municipalities and business leaders to participate in a regional economic development effort, resulting in a plan called *Balancing a Region in Transition*, prepared by the nationally known consultant A.D. Little. This study made recommendations for the diversification of the region's economy to face these challenges, two of the most significant of which were to transform the RPA to a Council of Governments (COG) and to merge two smaller regional economic agencies into what is now the region's federally recognized economic development organization, the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer).

In 1993, the municipalities in the region adopted local ordinances to transform the RPA into today's Southeastern CT Council of Governments. Dick Erickson was retained as Executive Director, a post he held until his retirement. His visionary leadership and sound presentation of the facts convinced municipal leaders that an agency with Chief Elected Officials serving on the board of directors could be more effective and have a greater impact on the region than one which was limited to the recommendations that could be made by the representatives of local planning boards. He had the foresight to convince the COG's new board of the wisdom of inviting the Chairmen of the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribes as well as the CO of the SUBASE and Superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy to join the COG as affiliate non-voting members. With the advent of the COG, new funding sources and work initiatives became available that would assist member municipalities in providing services to their residents. While


I think the most that can be expected from a regional structure is a balancing of the interests of those municipalities. There is nothing that would create a homogenized region, and it would create a pretty boring region if you could get that. I certainly am not going to advocate for that. Many of these differences are the result of historic events in the settlement and gradual development of the towns. Realistically, those differences are going to continue and may be highlighted and accentuated in the years ahead.

— From *New York Times* interview with R. Erickson, by Robert A. Hamilton, Sept. 21, 1997

transportation and land use planning remained a staple of the COG's work program, it also has included/now includes such diverse issues as emergency management, resiliency and sustainability planning, mental health, substance abuse avoidance, sharing of municipal services, law enforcement grants, regional election monitoring, training for local officials on a variety of issues.

After his retirement, Dick served on several boards and agencies including seCTer which he chaired, the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), and he performed volunteer work such as at his hometown Otis Library. He continued to work as a planning consultant, and in 2001, he authored the landmark affordable housing study *Housing a Region in Transition* for the COG, which won an award from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association. In 2005, he was a key member of the region's committee that

successfully convinced the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) not to close the SUBASE. Several years ago, Erickson was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), the highest award given by that organization to its members. Fellows of AICP are nominated and selected by their peers to recognize and honor their outstanding contributions as professional planners. I had the honor of joining several other long-time planners in the region in nominating Dick for this award. Criteria for selection as stated on the AICP College of Fellows website states: "The outcomes of their individual efforts left demonstrably significant and transformational improvements to the field of planning and the communities they served. All Fellows are long-time members of AICP and have achieved excellence in professional practice, teaching and mentoring, research, and community service and leadership. The College actively encourages Fellows and others to participate in programs and initiatives in the service of communities and the planning profession, including mentoring the next generation of planners; volunteering expertise to underserved communities; leading initiatives within APA chapters and divisions; and sharing knowledge with the planning community, allied professionals, and the wider public."

Dick Erickson did all of that and then some. While Dick was a humble and quiet man who never sought personal recognition, it is fitting that this professional honor was bestowed upon this giant of planning in southeastern Connecticut and it pays lasting tribute to all he contributed to our region. 



In Memoriam — Remembering Linda Farmer

by *Lauren Whitten*

money, and to have fun, we would split the hotel rooms during APA conferences, enjoy wine and cheese in the room, and once the conference was finished we would go on an adventure together. Our love for nature and dogs helped plan our adventures. Two of our greatest adventures was visiting Utah after the Vegas conference, seeing the national parks, and visiting Best Friends animal sanctuary in Kanab, Utah. We volunteered taking care and walking dogs there, and brought one pup back to the hotel with us to help it acclimate to new places and people. After the Seattle conference, we went up to Vancouver, BC, where we hiked around, and visited the sights and the beautiful sounds from whales and other aquatic creatures.

These are some of the many wonderful memories I will hold onto when remembering Linda.

With her bright red hair and bright fashion sense, Linda was a wonderful artist, talented planner, extremely bright, colorful, witty, and just great fun.

I hope the hole in our hearts is soon filled with your fondest memories of Linda Farmer.

— *Laurie Whitten has worked as an Inland Wetlands Agent, Zoning Enforcement Officer, Assistant Planner, and Director of Planning for the towns Enfield, Simsbury, and East Windsor, as well as San Diego, CA and Lynwood, WA. She loves to travel and has fostered and rehomed over 120 dogs — two of the many things she shared with Linda Farmer.*

December 19, 2025 — It is truly with a heavy heart that I pass on the information of **Linda Farmer's** passing.

Linda and I became friends about 20-plus years ago while serving on the CAZEO executive committee. Our friendship grew as planners, attending seminars and conferences together. To save

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Overview of CCAPA Leadership & Committee Roles



Jon Reiner, AICP



Georgienna Driver



Abby Kenyon, AICP



Sam Gold, AICP



Amanda Kennedy, AICP



Tabitha Wilson, AICP, LEED-AP



Jeremy DeCarli, AICP, CZEO



Anthony Lagana



Evan Seeman



Stephanie Camp, AICP



Deb Lawlor, FAICP, PP



John Guskowski, FAICP,
LEED-AP, ENV-SP



Kyle Shiel, AICP



Devin Clarke



Marek Kozikowski, AICP

CCAPA Chapter Leadership

President: Jon Reiner, AICP

Vice President: Georgienna Driver

Secretary: Abby Kenyon, AICP

Treasurer: Sam Gold, AICP

Communications Committee Co Chairs:
Amanda Kennedy, AICP, and Tabitha Wilson, AICP,
LEED-AP

Professional Development Officer: Jeremy DeCarli,
AICP, CZEO

Membership Committee Chair: Anthony Lagana

Program Committee Co Chairs: Evan Seeman and
Stephanie Camp, AICP

Awards Committee Chair: Deb Lawlor, FAICP, PP

Government Relations Committee Co-Chairs:
John Guskowski, FAICP, LEED-AP, ENV-SP and
Kyle Shiel, AICP

Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee:
Devin Clarke

SNEAPA Committee Chair: Marek Kozikowski, AICP

FAICP Committee: Dwight Merriam, FAICP,
Jeff Taebel, FAICP, Deb Lawlor, FAICP, PP,
Rick Redniss, FAICP, Bill Voelker, FAICP

Over many issues, readers have found varied committee chair reports available throughout this magazine. In the same vein as public engagement and trust building, we've herded the cool cats of the CCAPA Executive Committee together so our members and clientele can see the bigger picture of what goes on behind the website. A lot goes into running a volunteer organization and up until 2026, CCAPA has been 100% led and managed by volunteers.

Now, approximately 80% of the heavy lifting of CCAPA management, hundreds of hours of work, is done by the 23 members of the Executive Committee, with a special nod to the Committee chairs. After much discussion over several years, CCAPA has hired part-time support from TCORS Capitol Group, LLC, a full-service government relations and association management company. Their role with CCAPA continues to wonderfully percolate to support outreach and visibility.

In the Committee and leadership reports that follow there is no distinct theme. In pursuit of not architecting their words, each chair has used their own language to talk about themselves and their vision for the role of committee, or possibly to just report the latest updates. Anyway, enjoy getting to know your leadership. It's fun (and rewarding!) volunteering to help the chapter, so think about getting involved. Reach out to a committee chair or our Chapter leadership.

■ **CCAPA Vice President**

The Vice President's role on the executive board is to serve as the Chapter's Vice President. Georgianna Driver is the current Vice President. "I provide a variety of support and guidance to assist the President in the coordination of Chapter activities. I carry out duties given to me from the President and may act temporarily as President in their absence. I serve on the Government & Relations Committee and the SNEAPA Committee as well, where I assist in the organization and setup of our New England Planning Conference for Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. With SNEAPA, we hope to always include young planners and students as they emerge into their Land Use careers. SNEAPA, led by the current Chair, Marek Kozikowski, is a great way to become more involved in our Chapter organization and network. Our crew is always looking for new members to join this committee and bring valuable insight to the table. And as VP, I encourage any new and upcoming Planners to join CCAPA, as our state planning chapter offers excellent resources, educational events, career opportunities, and memories that will last a lifetime. We have an excellent group of professionals, all volunteers, that make CCAPA so unique and diverse. Should you have any questions about getting involved, please reach out to our Executive Board by emailing ctplanners@gmail.com.

■ **CCAPA Secretary**

The Chapter Secretary is one of four Chapter Officer positions. The primary responsibility of the Secretary is to take meeting minutes for the Executive Board meetings and to archive meeting minutes and other chapter documents. As part of this, the Secretary also tracks Executive Board meeting attendance. One of the highlights of the position is managing the Diana Donald Scholarship Internship Award. Diana Donald, who passed away in 1975, was a Connecticut-based planner who was recognized nationally for her contributions to the profession. At the time of her passing, she was the First Vice President of the American Institute of Planners and was in line to become President. In honor of her legacy, each year the Chapter awards \$3500 to an organization to hire an intern who is a student in a planning or planning-related field, to work on a planning project. The Secretary is responsible for announcing this opportunity, responding to inquiries, collecting the applications, and coordinating with the Awards Committee on the review and evaluation of submissions. Based on the feedback and ranking from the Awards Committee, the Secretary then makes a recommendation to the Executive Board for the award. Once awarded, the Secretary coordinates the payment to the organization and oversees final grant reporting requirements. Serving as Secretary of the Chapter is a great way to take an active role in Chapter activities and work with colleagues to support and advance the planning practice in the state.

■ **CCAPA Treasurer**

The Treasurer of the Chapter has the nominal role of managing the finances from your dues. This includes: receiving and disbursing Chapter funds; preparing an annual budget for review and adoption by the Executive Board; maintaining accounts which shall be open to inspection by Chapter Officers and subject to audit; making arrangements for accounting and tax consulting services; ensuring that tax forms are submitted in accordance with deadlines; making regular reports to the Executive Board on the financial status of the Chapter; notifying the national office of APA of the amount to be charged for annual Chapter dues; and submitting quarterly and year-end financial reports to APA. Current Treasurer is Sam Gold, AICP.

■ **Communications Committee**

The role of the Communications Committee is to publish a chapter newsletter or in Connecticut's case, *CT Planning* magazine. This is an effort that requires a sizeable number of volunteer hours, both on the part of the authors and CCAPA's volunteer editor. The overall goal is transmitting current and relevant topics of interest to the chapter members. The most important mission to

(continued next page)

CCAPA Leadership & Committee Roles, cont'd

keep the channels open for and between members of the Chapter and partner organizations. Toward that end, the Communications Committee also maintains the website and ideally, we would have a larger committee of volunteers to help with social media posting and information gathering about the projects and activities of our membership. We are always looking for interested volunteers. Committee Co-chairs are Amanda Kennedy and newly appointed Tabitha Wilson. Reach out if you would like to get involved.

■ Professional Development Officer

The Professional Development Officer (PDO) has several responsibilities within the American Planning Association (APA), American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), and specifically on behalf of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) and its membership. This is an elected position with a seat on the Executive Committee of the CCAPA Board. These responsibilities include:

- Lead the Chapter's efforts to support AICP Certification Maintenance.
- Publicize and encourage participation in the Certification Maintenance Program.
- Encourage and assist qualified planners to become AICP members.
- Coordinate the Chapter's annual AICP Exam Prep class.
- Provide information, arrange seminars, and otherwise further professional development of planners in the Chapter area.
- Work with the PDOs of MA and RI to present an annual joint Exam Prep Class at SNEAPA other opportunities throughout the year.
- Certification Maintenance (CM): All AICP members must earn 32 CM credits every two years. The credits must include 1 CM each in: Law, Ethics, Sustainability & Resilience and Equity.

It is important for planning professionals to be well-rounded and have an up-to-date toolbox. Keeping your skill set sharpened is a terrific way to make sure you're always a step up on the learning curve - whether in your current position or when the next big opportunity comes along.

The PDO can help members ensure you meet these requirements. CM earning opportunities are promoted primarily through the Chapter Emails and the listserv. Be sure to stay tuned for opportunities and reach out to the PDO at pdoccapa@gmail.com.

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■ Program Committee Update

2025 was another busy year for CCAPA, with a great variety of programs offered in partnership with state agencies and organizations. In 2025 alone, over 87 CM credits were offered to our membership! This included events like the Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Company (CATIC) Symposium on real estate law as a catalyst for closing the racial wealth gap; a CCAPA Government Relations-led Land Use Legislative Update, co-facilitated with the CBA and CAZEO; an evening at Hartford's Dunkin Donuts Park cheering on the Yard Goats and networking; our annual Hot Topics in Land Use event, coordinated by CCAPA's Government Relations Co-Chairs; the YIMBYTown 2025 housing conference, and more.

2026 has already started off strong with a great event centered on Connecticut's new housing bill — Special Session Public Act 25-1 (HB 8002). In January, CCAPA e-board members Savannah-Nicole (SN) Villalba, Kyle Shiel, and John Guskowski — along with several other panelists from various Councils of Governments, the Office of Policy & Management, the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Connecticut, and Tyche Planning & Policy Group — led this session. The panelists gave planners and land use commissioners a broad overview of the new legislation and drilled down on some of the more immediate and pressing pieces of the bill that will have significant impacts on all municipalities. The presentation slides from this event, as well a summary of the bill created by the Connecticut Association of Councils of Governments (CTCOG) can be found on the CCAPA website here: <https://ct.planning.org/events/past-events>.

Later this winter, a newly formed Program Committee will be meeting for the first time to begin brainstorming new program ideas for the rest of 2026 and beyond. We are excited to welcome many new faces, as well as several existing e-board members, to our refreshed Committee. Meet the team!

Stephanie Camp, Town Planner, Town of Stratford, Co-Chair — Stephanie is the Town Planner for the Town of Stratford, her home town, and Co-Chair of the CCAPA Program Committee. She is passionate about increasing diversity and inclusivity in planning as a profession.

Jeremy DeCarli, Senior Planner, Tyche Planning & Policy Group (Ex-Officio Member) — Jeremy is a Senior Planner with Tyche Planning and

(continued next page)

Program Committee Update, cont'd

Policy Group. Past roles include the Director of Planning and Community Development in the Town of Southington, Planning and Zoning Official for the Town of East Hampton, and Regional Planner at the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments. He obtained an MS in Geography with a concentration in Planning from Central Connecticut State University and a BA in Sociology from Emmanuel College. Jeremy also serves as the Professional Development Officer for CCAPA.

Brendon Dukett, Director of Regional Planning and Municipal Services, South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG) — Brendon Dukett is the Director of Regional Planning and Municipal Services at SCRCOG. In his free time, he enjoys the outdoors and tending to his half-acre vegetable and flower garden with his trusty sidekicks Morgan and Milo.

Nicole (Nic) Haggerty, Planning Director, Town of Colchester — Nic holds a B.S. in Historic Preservation from Roger Williams University and a M.S. in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Texas at Austin, and currently serves as the Planning Director for the Town of Colchester. She also serves on the board of the Connecticut Main Street Center. In her free time, Nic enjoys reading, making jewelry, and spending time outdoors.

Anthony Lagana, Transportation Planner I, Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) — Anthony Lagana is a Transportation Planner at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) in Waterbury, CT, where he contributes to NVCOG's Vision Zero planning and Transit planning/administration for the Greater Waterbury Transit District (GWTD) and Valley Transit District (VTD). He also serves as CCAPA's Membership Committee Chair.

Simone Lesci, Regional Planner, Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments (MetroCOG) — Simone holds an MPA and loves planning, whether it's at work or the next trip to Lake George. He enjoys fishing, camping, and cooking Italian food, and is a big fan of watching soccer (Inter-Milan) and American Football (Patriots, of course).

Marchell Magxaka, Ph.D., Planner II, Community Development, Town of Groton — Marchell Magxaka is a Community Development Planner with the Town of Groton, where he leads housing and neighborhood

initiatives focused on expanding access, strengthening communities, and advancing equitable development. He manages State Department of Housing (DOH) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, oversees the Town's Housing Rehabilitation Program, and provides staff support to the Fair Housing and Fair Rent Commission.

Noah Miller, Regional Planner, Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments (MetroCOG) — Noah graduated with a Master of Public Policy from the University of Connecticut where he developed an interest in planning, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability. In his free time he enjoys running, hiking, and traveling, especially to national and state parks.

Lindsay Naughton, Climate Resilience Project Manager — Lindsay is a project manager and urban planner specializing in climate resilience, leading projects that assess vulnerability to future climate hazards and develop targeted mitigation strategies tailored to each context. She draws on ten years of experience in AEC business development and as a planner at a council of governments to translate technical information into visual storytelling, tools, and guides that help communities prepare for and respond to climate change.

Jacob Robison, Assistant Project Manager, Colliers Engineering & Design — Jacob manages planning projects for Colliers Engineering & Design and hosts the bi-monthly Planners' Board Game Night.

Esther Rose-Wilen, Assistant Director of Comprehensive Planning, New Haven City Plan — Esther grew up in New Haven and has worked with City Plan for the last 4.5 years. Mostly recently, she managed the update to New Haven's Plan of Conservation and Development, Vision 2034, with an emphasis on equity and resilience, and engaging youth in the planning process.

Evan Seeman, Partner, Real Estate + Development, Robinson & Cole, Co-Chair — Evan Seeman is a partner in Robinson & Cole's Real Estate + Development Group, who concentrates his practice in land use and zoning, real property litigation, and municipal law. In addition to being a board member and co-chairing the Program Committee for CCAPA, Evan is a Past Chair of the APA's Planning and Law Division and Law Content Review Committee.

We look forward to creating new programming that is both informative, educational, inclusive, and fun.

CCAPA Leadership & Committee Roles, cont'd

■ CCAPA Membership Committee

My name is Anthony Lagana, and I am a Transportation Planner at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) in Waterbury, CT. I currently serve as the Member Services Committee Chair at the CCAPA. The Member Services Committee primarily works to maintain an accurate roster of all Chapter members, as well as to recruit new members. The Committee also provides information to new and prospective members on the services available to CCAPA members, along with assistance in joining the Chapter if requested. The Committee is also tasked to engage chapter members to better understand the composition, interests, and needs of Chapter membership, which is used by the Executive Board as it establishes goals and engages in its work. The Member Services Committee is currently looking for committee members! Some of the specific things we would like to tackle in the coming years include promoting youth and student CCAPA membership, engaging young and emerging planners to better understand their needs and connect them with veteran planners, and engaging a wider range of planning professionals (e.g., transportation planners and environmental planners) to understand how CCAPA can provide a diverse range of services for current and potential members with specialized or niche roles. If you are interested in contributing to these efforts and joining the committee, please contact me by email at alagana@nvcogct.gov.

■ CCAPA Awards Committee

Annually, the CCAPA Awards Committee holds a call for nominations to recognize outstanding people, projects and efforts related to the Planning field in the state of Connecticut. The nomination announcement goes out to all members. Categories may vary, but in recent years they have included:

Education & Outreach — For a planning project or initiative that significantly contributed to the achievement of a community's plans, policies, and goals. Examples include, but are not limited to, publications, interactive project websites, public planning and design charrettes or seminars.

Implementation — For a planning project or initiative of unusually high merit with demonstrated "on the ground" results attributable to exemplary plan implementation.

Sustainability — For a plan, project or program marked by its promotion of sustainability as defined by the Brundtland Commission (Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs). Examples include green infrastructure plans, resource conservation

efforts, alternative energy programs, and efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Media — For coverage of a planning issue in written, broadcast, or online media that broadens the general public's awareness and understanding of planning.

Social Equity/Inclusion — For a plan, process or project advancing social and economic equality and inclusion, otherwise helping overcome discrimination.

Citizen Planner — For a citizen (or group of citizens) working in a non-compensated capacity that has devoted an exceptional amount of time, made a unique contribution, played an innovative or instrumental role, or otherwise contributed in a manner worthy of this special recognition.

"Rising Star" Planner — For a professional planner, during their first 10 years of practice, who has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to leadership, professional development, and the advancement of the field of planning in Connecticut.

Innovative Plan/Law — For a plan or local law uniquely addressing a contemporary or challenging issue.

In addition to nominations made by our Planning peers, the CCAPA President has the honor of selecting a member deserving of the **Bruce Hoben Distinguished Service** award. The President may also give a **Chapter Award** in recognition of an outstanding effort by a Chapter member or accomplishment of the organization.

A call for nominations generally takes place in late winter with an awards ceremony held in the spring. Nominations are reviewed by a committee of 4-6 CCAPA members with a recommendation of awardees submitted to the CCAPA Executive Committee.

■ Government Relation Committee

The CCAPA Government Relations Committee works on behalf of membership to engage with legislators and the executive branch to enact and respond to legislation that impacts the work of CCAPA planners, the land use commissions and the planning profession in Connecticut. It is the most visible of the committees in engaging and promoting Connecticut planning with state leaders.

John Guskowski has been the Government Relations Officer for the past 10 years, but that title disguises the fact that this is a huge, multi-person role. "My co-chair of the Government Relations Committee, Kyle Shiel, AICP, and I have worked to be inclusive with the insights and opinions of our 35-plus-member Committee. Our task is

(continued next page)

CCAPA Leadership & Committee Roles, cont'd

to be the “eyes and ears” in Hartford, working with key legislators and Committees and tracking legislative initiatives that can impact our communities in a range of areas, including zoning, housing, transportation, sustainability, environmental quality, and equity. We are always looking active Committee members and those who like discussing and writing about public policy and advancing the profile of the Planning profession as thought leaders in Connecticut.”

■ Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee is a newer CCAPA committee and an important committee. Community building and land use are successful only with inclusion, engagement and acceptance. As committee chair, Devin Clarke noted in a report to CCAPA, “Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is not just a popular term in today’s social and political climate. This concept has become laden with rhetoric that is increasingly divisive and contentious. DEI as a concept and its initiatives are built on principles that promote and foster environments that support and value all individuals regardless of one’s background. While the term garners a wide range of thoughts and perspectives, as planners we cannot lose sight of the true meaning and purpose of the initiative. Representation, the feeling of belonging, and ensuring fairness should not be a debated, tumultuous, nor a partisan discussion. As DEI Chair, I look to gather perspectives and ideas from Connecticut’s planning community (& adjacent planning partners) on how CCAPA and the larger CT planning industry can advance the goals and objectives of our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan. CCAPA will continue to support the recruitment and retention of talented planning professionals across all agencies and organizations. Developing and maintaining a robust network of planning professionals throughout the state is an important goal for CCAPA. CCAPA and I hope through program development we are able to provide and leverage initiatives that support current planners that holistically improve our work, our organizations, and our communities.

■ FAICP Committee

In congratulating CT’s newest inductees into the 2026 class of the College of Fellows, Dwight Merriam, FAICP summed up the extraordinary achievement of being inducted into the College of Fellows in words close to the following:

The first big step for many planners is to become a Certified Planner. Qualifying to become a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners requires education, experience, and proven performance as a planner. Examination pass rates are 60-65%.

But to go from there to election to the College of Fellows is another order of magnitude that most people might not fully appreciate. APA chapters and divisions are highly selective in screening potential nominations. The nominees, with the assistance of their mentors, make an enormous effort to present the strongest case for selection. Nominees must focus on their role in the development of planning projects, movements, laws, etc. that have made a difference to the communities we serve as well as the profession.

Since its establishment in 1999, just 778 individuals have been elected to the College of Fellows out of all the Certified Planners and highly qualified nominees. Of those, 660 are living today. That is a mere 1.6% of the 40,447 APA members and 3.5% of the Certified Planners.

As of 2026, the following CCAPA members have been inducted into the esteemed College of Fellows and received the designation of FAICP. Several members were nominated by a state chapter other than CT or a division of APA national.

Horace Brown*	2008
Hung Chung*	2000
Richard Erikson*	2012
John Guszowski	2026
David Kooris	2026
Deborah Lawlor	2012
Peter Mancuse*	2004
Dwight Merriam	2001
Richard Redniss	2022
Jeffrey Taebel	2008
William Voelker	2024
David Woods	2020

■ SNEAPA Committee: Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts

Rotating every year, one of the above-named states hosts the annual Southern New England American Planning Association (SNEAPA) Conference. The conference is the quintessential gathering of regional planners to share and learn from each other through workshops, mobile workshops and conversational gatherings. It is also an affordable option for the national conference for planners whose budgets are constrained.

The SNEAPA committee chairs are the leaders and organizers of meetings throughout the year. Depending on which state is hosting, the state’s SNEAPA chair is responsible to assembling a group of volunteers to select a venue, design the program, recruit speakers and workshop ideas, review and select the workshops for the final programs to ensure that education provided meets CM/AICP criteria. Add into the mix, the need to update the website, post the registration, collect payment, manage the expectations and questions of attendees and present a smiling welcoming face at the registration desk on from

(continued next page)

CCAPA Leadership & Committees, cont'd

Thursday night to Friday late afternoon.

Marek Kozikowski, AICP is the current SNEAPA Conference Chair. “I volunteer to serve as Chair of the Southern New England American Planning Association (SNEAPA) Conference Committee because the conference has been a meaningful way for me to build relationships and collaborate with planners across our region. I first became involved with SNEAPA in 2015 as a member of the program subcommittee, and over time the work of organizing the conference allowed me to develop strong professional connections with planners from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts who are all working toward the same goal of improving our communities through thoughtful planning.

“The collaborative nature of the SNEAPA planning committee is one of the things that makes the conference successful. It brings together planners from different backgrounds, sectors, and communities to work toward a common goal of creating a conference that is valuable for our profession. That experience ultimately led to my involvement on the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) Executive Board.

“Serving as Chair allows me to continue fostering those relationships and working alongside colleagues to create an event that supports professional development, idea sharing, and collaboration among planners throughout Southern New England.”

The collaborative nature of the SNEAPA planning committee is one of the things that makes the conference successful. It brings together planners from different backgrounds, sectors, and communities to work toward a common goal of creating a conference that is valuable for our profession.



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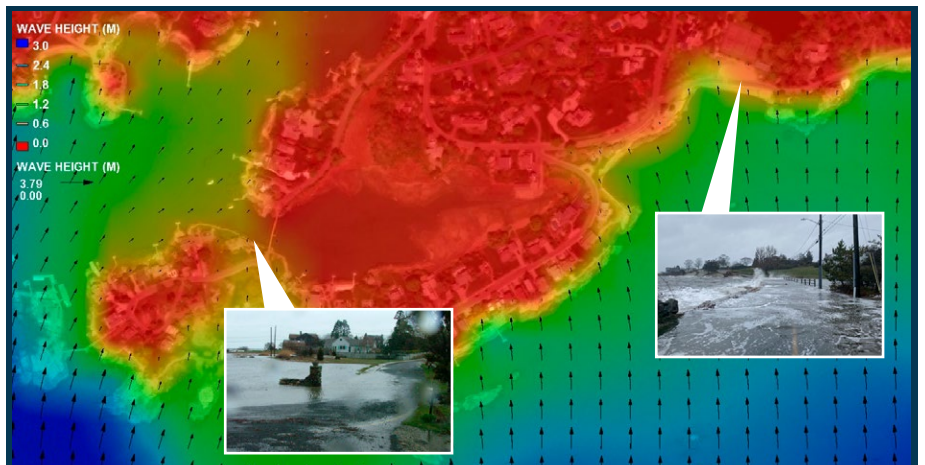
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SNEAPA 2025: Smooth Sailing in Newport

by Marek Kozikowski, AICP, SNEAPA Conference Chair

On November 6 and 7, the SNEAPA 2025 Conference hosted over 500 planners, municipal officials, consultants, students, and allied professionals gathered in Newport, Rhode Island for two days of professional development, regional collaboration, and renewed energy. By the final session, it was clear that the conversations sparked in Newport will continue well beyond the conference itself.

As always, SNEAPA brought together professionals from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island to compare notes and share strategies. The challenges we face do not stop at state lines, and this year's program reflected that reality. Housing affordability, climate resilience, infrastructure investment, historic preservation, and equitable development surfaced repeatedly throughout the sessions. Attendees found practical ideas, relatable case studies, and reassurance that their neighboring states are wrestling with many of the same issues.

The conference featured 40 breakout sessions covering a wide range of timely topics. Certified planners earned AICP Certification Maintenance credits, including sessions in ethics, law, equity, and sustainability and resilience. More importantly, participants left with actionable insights they can bring back to their own boards, commissions, and communities.

The keynote address by Keith W. Stokes was a highlight of the program. Drawing on his background in public service, preservation, and economic

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Keynote Speaker Keith W. Stokes



The future is bright with these planners.



Connecticut Chapter meeting.



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Young Planners Session



SNEAPA Session

SNEAPA, cont'd

development, Stokes connected history and equity in a way that felt especially fitting in Newport. His message served as a reminder that planning is not just technical work. It shapes people's daily lives and the long-term story of place.

Mobile workshops once again proved to be a major draw. Attendees explored coastal resilience efforts at Easton's Beach and the Cliff Walk, toured redevelopment initiatives in Newport's North End, and examined adaptive reuse tied

to the region's historic rail infrastructure. Bike tours, walking tours, and hands-on workshops reinforced an important lesson: planning concepts come to life most clearly when seen in the field.

Of course, SNEAPA is also about relationships. Hallway conversations, shared meals, and the Thursday evening reception created space for planners to reconnect and build new partnerships. Students and emerging professionals engaged confidently with seasoned practitioners, strengthening the next generation of regional leadership.

For Connecticut planners, the conference offered valuable perspective. The issues discussed in Newport closely mirror those we face along Long Island Sound and throughout our communities. Exchanging ideas across state lines strengthens our collective ability to respond thoughtfully and creatively.

The SNEAPA 2025 Conference was made possible by a dedicated volunteer committee and strong participation from across the region. Newport provided a memorable setting, but it was the people and the shared commitment to better planning that defined the event.

SNEAPA 2026 Conference Announcement

We are excited to announce that SNEAPA 2026 Conference will be held on October 8-9 at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut. Building on the continued success of recent conferences, the 2026 program will once again feature a full slate of breakout sessions, a keynote speaker to be announced, mobile workshops, and the networking opportunities that have become a hallmark of SNEAPA. The conference will bring together planners and allied professionals from across southern New England for two days of learning, collaboration, and connection. A call for session proposals will open in May, and those interested in sponsorship opportunities are encouraged to reach out directly to Marek Kozikowski, AICP, at mkozikowskiAICP@gmail.com. We look forward to welcoming the region's planning community to Connecticut for another engaging and memorable conference. 🗓️

Fighting 100 Duck-Sized Horses — A Dispatch from the Legislative Short Session

by John Guskowski, FAICP, CZEO

At this writing, the 2026 legislative “short session” is almost a month in, and we are deep in the bowels (not going to say “deep in the heart”) of the bill analysis and public hearing phase. Most legislators and advocacy groups understand that in a short session, and particularly in a contentious election year following a fairly contentious 2025 legislative session, expectations for major legislation should be tempered. We don’t anticipate huge, earth-shattering bills. As of yet, we haven’t gotten any.



But not everyone has gotten the memo about taking it easy this early spring. The last few weeks of bill releases have shown that some legislators are taking a small-bore, death-by-a-thousand-cuts approach to making change, and there is still very much a need to keep an eagle eye out there for the many proposals being floated.

In part for that reason, my legislative co-chair Kyle Shiel and I are grateful for the help of Christine O’Neill, who has graciously agreed to step up into the role of Vice-Chair of the Government Relations Committee, to help share the burden of reviewing bills of potential relevance to the Planning community as well as to draft testimony. We are grateful for Christine’s thoughtful assistance.

Following our recent practice, the Government Relations Committee convened in December to have an initial brainstorming meeting to identify potential priorities for the legislative session. Following that discussion, we created a survey of potential priorities that was shared with the entire CCAPA membership to help rate and rank these initiatives. In addition to several ongoing and new priorities, there was a strong sense that following the passage of HB 8002 in the November special session (now PA 25-1), the Chapter should focus its efforts on helping our membership and our communities understand the new law and begin to grapple with the regulatory changes and new Housing Growth Plan requirements. Ultimately, the Chapter has identified three major priority tasks for the 2026 session, and several additional goals. The major priorities are:

1. Allow for Town Website Posting of Legal Notices in Lieu of Newspapers

We strongly urge amendments to CGS Section 8-7 regarding public notification of meetings, hearings, and decisions, allowing municipal website notification in lieu of newspaper publication. The CT Supreme Court decision in the “Fenwick” case demonstrates that the current newspaper notification system is broken and needs a legislative fix. This reform would not only save municipalities money, but more importantly, provide residents relevant and timely information in more widely accessible platforms.

2. Providing Resources to Municipalities in Implementing SSPA 25-1 & Supporting Minor Changes to the Act

Following the passage of HB 8002/PA 25-1, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about process, responsibilities, timeframes, and pathways. All of our communities will be affected by this significant bill, and it will fall to the Planning community to help inform, guide, and advocate for both local decision-making and a smooth regional and state process.

Certain components of this very large and complex bill still need some adjustment. Some of these include clarifying the role and authorities of the Council on Housing Development relative to OPM and COGs, the nature and process for grants-in-aid, and some of the effective dates of Act sections (eg. the July 1, 2026 requirement for adopting commercial-to-residential zoning regulations in Section 16). We will need to be active in educating legislators about how these sections will “hit the ground” in our communities.

3. Clarify Municipal Authority to Require Fee-In-Lieu of Sidewalks

Similar to other authorized fee-in-lieu provisions, we support legislative language that allows municipalities to demand and receive payments in lieu of requiring installation of sidewalks for projects where they may not be needed or appropriate. Legislation should stipulate that FILO funds be used to bolster the community’s sidewalk network in more suitable locations.

Thanks in part to our active advocacy and communication with legislative leadership, the first and third of the above priorities have already had bills proposed and public hearings at the Planning & Development Committee level, and we have submitted testimony in support. In addition to the major goals, the Chapter has identified a number of other priorities. These include:

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Legislative Update, cont'd

1. Clarify or eliminate the provisions of Section 21 of Public Act 24-143.
2. Reform the Process of Granting of Variances by ZBA.
3. Rescind PA 22-40 that Froze Funding for Transit Districts and Support Better Transit Funding.
4. Provide Greater Support to Municipalities on Stormwater Management and Compliance with MS4 Requirements.
5. Revisit CAM Compliance Requirements for Single-Family Residences in Coastal Communities.
6. Support Effective Implementation of Housing and Environmental Sustainability Policies.

As ever, we are appreciative of the active support and vocal participation of our Government Relations Committee membership and the strong and growing relationship that we have both with key legislators and their staffs as well as advocates and partners from allied professions. If anyone has questions or concerns about CCAPA's legislative agenda or activities, we encourage you to reach out to us at ctplannersgovrel@gmail.com. 🇺🇸

— *John P. Guskowski, FAICP, CZEO, is Co-Chair of the CCAPA Government Relations Committee.*

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