Western Central Chapter Newsletter

A publication of the Western Central Chapter of the American Planning Association

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Written by: ***Jeff Bollman, AICP***

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Greetings Western Central Chapter Members,

Happy New Year!

I hope that you were able to take some time off and enjoy the Holidays and get recharged for the long, cold march to spring. As I write this and look out at the new snow, I think of how this time of year is one in which we make Resolutions (or maybe as Planners, we set goals) and then work throughout the year to fulfill them.

In 2019, I set a pretty crazy goal… well, even for me. In my "free" time I like to run, especially the marathon and ultramarathon distances. I decided that 2019 would be the year that I attempted to complete a 100-mile ultramarathon. Yes, you read that correctly… one hundred miles. I chose Javelina Jundred, which happens on the last weekend of October at a state park, northeast of Phoenix. To try and complete this goal, I found a training plan that I felt fit my needs and went to work in May. I incorporated some marathons and ultramarathons into the plan, which I liked to call supported training



runs! I made it through training without any injuries and went down to AZ with one mission: to be done with the training plan! OK, so the training plan really was A LOT, but it prepared me well for the race.

I ended up finishing in 26 hours and 12 minutes. I had set this crazy goal and accomplished it. It's an amazing feeling to hit that finish line at the end of 100 miles of trail running and realize that DID IT… and you don't need to run anymore!

If you are still looking for a goal or resolution for 2020, think about volunteering with the WCC. We are still looking to fill some critical positions in the Chapter.

We are looking for:

Professional Development Officer (PDO): The PDO is responsible for helping the Chapter and states provide educational opportunities and serves as a connection between the states and APA National.

The PDO also assists Planners that are pursuing AICP certification. Interested? You must be a member of AICP and be in the WCC region.

Additionally, WCC can help provide some travel assistance to attend the APA National conference so the PDO can meet up with other chapter PDOs and learn what is new from APA National and AICP.

Contact Jeff Bollman at jeff.bollman@me.com if you are interested or would like more information.

One of my goals for 2020 is also running related, to again run a Boston Marathon qualifying time. This goal will require a lot of work, like the 100 milers, but this time it will be speed focused instead of distance. I have run Boston twice before and am hopeful that I can get a fast-enough time to get in again. It's the getting old part, that makes it more challenging!





American Planning Association
Western Central Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

Interested in Contributing? It's easy!

The WCC-APA encourages readers, members, and others to submit articles and columns for publication. Contributing is easy, and the WCC looks forward to sharing your article with the WCC community. How does one contribute, you ask? Here's a few quick tips:

- Contact newsletter editor Jacob Cote at: jacobscote@live.com
- Determine a topic that is applicable to the WCC reader base. Not sure? Ask away!
- Writing goals: a *column* is between 700-1,200 words; An *article* is between 1,200-2,000 words.
- You will be provided with a few simple requirements to include in your submittal, including a short author bio, citations *(if necessary)*, headline, photos, and photo credits.

We look forward to receiving your contribution and sharing it with our planning community!

WCC-APA Passes its Budget & Work Plan for 2020 AND its 2020 Strategic Development Plan

After several months of drafting, reviewing, and discussing, the WCC's Executive Board has officially approved an updated Draft Strategic Development Plan. The Plan's intent is multi-faceted: it 11will guide the Chapter's efforts to provide professional training and certification opportunities for members, support continuing education, and more. The strategies and action tasks are accompanied by information on responsible parties, time frames, and tracking methods the WCC can use to determine the efficacy of the plan.

A copy of the 2020 Strategic Development Plan Draft can be found HERE. The Board would like your comments on the Draft, so please take a look and send any edits, comments, and/or suggestions to Jeff Bollman at jeff.bollman@me.com by 2/29/20.

The Executive Board also voted to approve the Chapter's 2020 Budget and 2020 Work Plan. The budget reflects anticipated travel and conference attendance expenses and can be found HERE. The Work Plan, found HERE, is a more immediate breakdown of the Strategic Development Plan. It will be used as a guide for the continued improvement and expansion of the WCC. We're thrilled to have our plans and budget in place for the start of the new decade!



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Western Central Chapter

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JEFF SPECK SPEAKING EVENT

BILLINGS ARCHITECTURE ASSOCIATION'S 2020 CONFERENCE

Written by: ***Jacob Cote***

When: ***Thursday, April 16 @ 6 PM***
Where: ***Babcock Theater, downtown Billings, MT***

The Billings Architecture Association (BAA), in collaboration with the Billings Chamber of Commerce, Big Sky Economic Development, the City of Billings, Healthy by Design, and Rocky Mountain College is proud to announce an exciting opportunity for the High Plains: Jeff Speck, up close and in person!

Jeff will be coming to speak at the BAA's annual conference on **Thursday, April 16th** at the **Babcock Theater** in **downtown Billings**. The event is free for all attendees, and WCC members are encouraged to attend!

A committee of community stakeholders—including, among others, the mayor, city manager, and downtown & economic development directors of Billings—has been meeting regularly with the BAA to coordinate the event. More details will be made available on the WCC's Twitter and Instagram accounts in the coming weeks. The account names, for those not already following, are:

Instagram: westerncentralchapter

Twitter: @WestCentralChap

Ed Gulick, President of the BAA, has completed an audit of Billings based on the rules of Jeff Speck's book *Walkable City Rules: 101 Steps to Making Better Places*, comparing Speck's recommendations to the existing conditions in Billings. This audit—a very thorough assessment of the city's walkability—has been an exceptional resource for the committee's planning efforts. The intent of the audit is to establish a baseline understanding of existing conditions. With a thorough understanding of present challenges and opportunities in Billings, city leadership can more easily apply Jeff Speck's *101 Steps* in the community.

Billings, as the largest city in the WCC region, faces some unique challenges that other cities and towns in the area may not need consider. However, Speck's message of walkability and its merits extend far beyond larger metropolitan areas.

Walkability is a benefit to communities of any size; planners everywhere in the WCC region can derive valuable lessons from this event. We invite all planners and city officials to attend the event and assess if the principles can be applied in their home communities. If there is opportunity to implement some of the *101 Steps* in your city or town, be sure to share it in future editions of our Quarterly Newsletter!

American Planning Association
Western Central Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All



2 PHOTOS REVEAL WHY THE KEY TO SLOWING TRAFFIC IS STREET DESIGN, NOT SPEED LIMITS

Written by: **Strong Towns**

Originally published: **January 8, 2019**

Strong Towns is a movement dedicated to making communities across North America financially strong and resilient. While the organization may focus primarily on financial responsibility, the elements of a Strong Town extend far beyond a balanced budget.

The cost of auto orientation—designing our towns and cities around the easy, fast movement of cars—is not just measured in dollars and cents. The number of U.S. traffic fatalities in 2017 topped 40,000 people. Nearly 6,000 of those people were on foot—a 25-year high. Each of those people had a unique story. Each of them had a family.

And after each high-profile crash, we all hear the same litany of advice from law enforcement and traffic safety professionals.

"Be hyper-aware of your surroundings."

"Always obey the speed limit."

"Speed is a factor in 30 percent of crashes."

"Safety is a shared responsibility."

And yet, we *know* that people are sometimes going to make mistakes.

Even conscientious drivers make mistakes. People walking, going about their business, are going to make mistakes. No one is going to be hyper-vigilant every moment that they're out in the world. And why should we have to?

We can't regulate our way to safety. We must design our streets to be safe.

Two simple photos reveal what it means to design a street to be safe, versus counting on the speed limit alone to do the job. This meme was created by planner Wes Craiglow of Conway, AR, and shared on social media by the "Transportation Psychologist," our friend, Bryan Jones. We first shared it back in 2015, but it remains timeless, so here it is again:

As Wes points out: "The meme is intended to help viewers consider how different street designs makes you feel as a driver, and ultimately affect how you behave behind the wheel. Generally speaking, as depicted by the lower photo, narrower travel lanes, shorter block lengths, and a tree canopy, all contribute to drivers traveling more slowly. Conversely, wide lanes, long block lengths and open



skies, as seen in the upper photo, communicate to drivers that higher speeds are appropriate."

Look again at the two photos. Imagine yourself behind the wheel of a car on each street. On which street would you drive faster? On which street would you exercise more caution?

"Forgiving" Design is a Misnomer

The first photo looks like tens of thousands of suburban streets all over America. It's entirely representative of something the transportation engineering profession calls "forgiving design." The premise is simple: drivers will make occasional mistakes—veer a bit out of their lane, fail to brake quite hard enough—and if the street is wide, with high visibility in all directions, and free of immediate obstacles such as trees and fences, those mistakes won't be catastrophic.

The problem: this street feels *too* forgiving to a driver. Too safe and comfortable. So drivers speed up. The engineers didn't account for this aspect of human psychology.

This residential street is built like a four-lane highway, and so even though its legal speed limit is 20 miles per hour, it's no surprise when somebody guns it up to 40 miles per hour or more down a street like this. It feels natural to do so. It feels safe. But it isn't safe—because on a city street, unlike a freeway, there might be people around. People who will most likely be badly hurt or killed if a speeding driver hits them.

Read transportation engineer Jon Larsen's explanation of why the forgiveness of slow speeds is better than the "forgiving" design of wide streets.

The Paradox of Street Design: If It Feels a Bit Dangerous, It's Probably Safer

The second photo, on the other hand, represents the most basic, frugal approach to designing a street for slow speeds. It's not perfect. It lacks sidewalks or bicycle facilities, which some of our readers might take issue with—and yes, many places ought to have those things.

But this "slow street" does something really profound and important. It causes drivers to slow down, whether or not there's a posted speed limit or law enforcement is present, because of the uncertainty and sense of heightened risk.

The street is narrow. Visibility is limited—look at that front left corner of the intersection, where a red fire hydrant stands next to a white fence. The lack of visibility there is not a safety hazard: paradoxically, it's probably the single biggest thing that promotes safety at this intersection. Because if you're driving here, and can't see whether a vehicle is approaching from the left, what are you going to do?

That's right. You're going to slow down.

Read Daniel Herrige's article on why narrow streets can deliver a ton of benefits to our cities and towns at low cost.

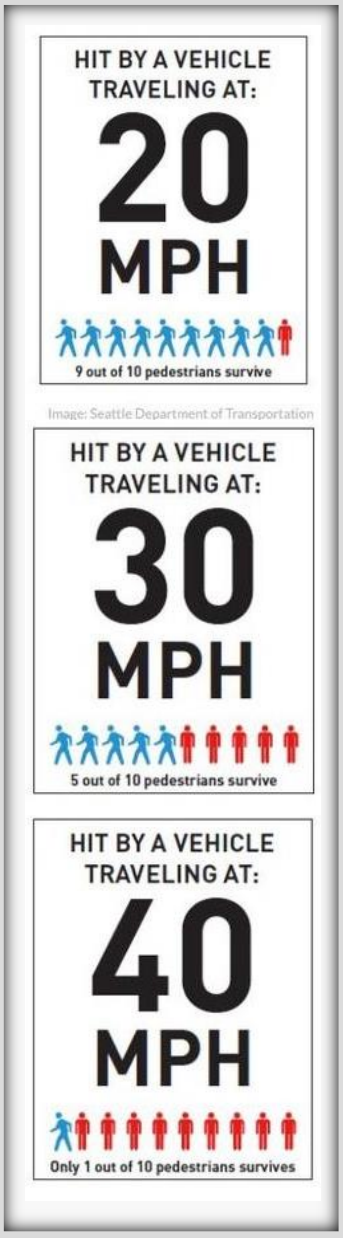
Why 20 Miles Per Hour?

If we could keep most urban traffic to 20 miles per hour or less, we could eliminate the vast majority of deaths from car crashes in our cities and towns. We wouldn't eliminate mistakes—people, both inside and outside vehicles, are going to make them—but those mistakes would rarely be deadly.

The place for wide lanes and "forgiving design" is on a high-speed road. City streets, on the other hand, should be places for people. We know how to design streets that will slow down traffic automatically, without the need for heavy-handed enforcement, and regardless of what the speed limit sign says. We just need to do it.

Read Chuck Marohn's article on the crucial difference between a street and a road.

Learn more about our Slow the Cars campaign.



American Planning Association
Western Central Chapter

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EVALUATING PLACE-BASED INCENTIVES

*A **HUD User** article*

*Originally Published: **Spring/Summer 2019***

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) is the primary source for this article distributed by HUD User. This article was one of several articles distributed by PD&R for the APA Young Planners Groups specifically for the purpose of reprinting in newsletters.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ARTICLE

- The nonrandom selection of Empowerment Zones (EZ) and Enterprise Communities (EC) presented evaluation challenges in past studies because isolating the effect of the designation on housing prices and job growth was difficult.
- Evaluations of Opportunity Zones (OZ) can employ the same indicators for neighborhood change used to evaluate EZ's and EC's such as job and business creation; changes in land prices, home values, and rents; and vacancy and poverty rates.
- Administrative and survey data at the census tract level are widely available and can support the effective evaluation of Opportunity Zones.

Although the Opportunity Zones initiative is new, place-based incentives are not. In the United Kingdom (UK), Margaret Thatcher's government introduced Enterprise Zones in 1981 to mixed success.[1] Although the UK government phased out the program in 1999, it was revived in 2012 and 2016.[2,3] UK Enterprise Zones were originally formed from "vacant, unoccupied, or deteriorating industrial land."[4] Over the next 10 years, new rules exempted Enterprise Zone properties from property taxes and the Development Land Tax, and developers in Enterprise Zones received a 100 percent tax deduction for spending on buildings and became exempt from some permitting requirements and data collection.[5] To measure the effect of the UK Enterprise Zones, researchers counted jobs and firms, examined land prices, and surveyed managers.[6] In general, the researchers found that only 25 percent of new jobs in the zones were attributable to the designation; the rest were merely relocations. In addition, researchers estimated the program cost per job at £23,000 to £50,000.[7] In the United States, several states tested the Enterprise Zone concept, and Empowerment Zones were explored at the national level. This article reviews evaluations of the impacts of some of these place-based interventions and discusses findings that could inform the evaluation of Opportunity Zones.

STATE ENTERPRISE ZONES

Early adopters of state enterprise zones in the United States included Indiana and New Jersey.[8] The state enterprise zones typically offered relief or complete exemption from property taxes along with wage tax credits in return for data reporting.[9] Papke presents results from some studies of these early efforts, finding that the cost per job for most of these programs ranged from $4,500 to $13,000 annually; in some cases, the cost reached $30,000 to more than $100,000 per zone resident job.[10]



A study of Texas Enterprise Zones found positive effects on employment growth. benedek/iStock.com

In the case of Texas, Freedman found that enterprise zones had positive effects on employment growth.[11] One important feature of the Texas study design that offers insights to researchers studying Opportunity Zones was that enterprise zone assignment in Texas was automatic; any area meeting the standards received the designation. This rule allowed researchers to compare nearby census tracts that were nearly identical before designation. For example, researchers could compare a tract with a poverty rate higher than 21 percent, which qualifies for the designation, against a nearby tract with a poverty rate of 19 percent, which does not. Although the difference between poverty rates of 19 and 21 percent may not be economically significant, the assignment of EZ status would be.

Freedman found that housing prices in zones that barely achieved enterprise zone designation increased by 10 percent more than those in zones that barely missed designation, and home vacancy rates in marginally qualified zones were 4 percent lower than those in zones that marginally did not qualify.

Empowerment Zones

Jack Kemp, first as a congressman and later as HUD Secretary from 1989 to 1992, strongly advocated for creating a federal program based on the enterprise zones. Although no such program was created under his watch, in 1994 the federal government designated the first Empowerment Zones (EZs), which included significant tax breaks with a large federal block grant to six urban and three rural targeted communities. Unlike enterprise zones, prospective EZs had to compete for the designation. (See "Place-Based Tax Incentives for Community Development," for more information on EZs, Enterprise Communities, and Renewal Communities.)[12]

Considerable research has examined the effects of EZs on various outcomes. Early HUD-sponsored research compared areas awarded EZ designation with those not awarded EZ designation. It used as metrics job creation by zone employers, business formation and expansion in zones, employment of zone residents by zone businesses, and business ownership by zone residents. The study's findings on the impact of the EZ program were inconclusive. Specifically, the researchers found that job growth in EZs outperformed that in comparison areas and that the number of new resident- and minority-owned businesses increased within the zones, but they could not determine a general trend of economic improvement from these numbers. In addition, job growth was correlated with EZ activity in only three of the six EZs. In the remaining three, job growth could have occurred because of other incentives or trends.[13]

Using mostly decennial census data, Busso, Gregory, and Kline examined the effects of EZs on economic indicators. In particular, the authors studied the estimated changes in rents and home prices in EZs relative to a comparison group of rejected EZ tracts and future applicant EZ tracts.

Using different estimation strategies, the authors found that EZ designation was correlated with an increase in home values of approximately 30 percent between 1990 and 2000, as self-reported in the decennial census, whereas rents increased by only 2 to 3 percent during the same period. The authors found this result striking and looked more closely at new residents or those who had last moved less than five years prior. These residents' responses indicated that in EZs, home prices were 15 to 20 percent higher, and rents 4 to 6 percent higher, than those in comparison tracts. Although these gaps were smaller, a sizable difference still existed between the effect of EZs on owner-occupied housing and the effect on rental housing. The authors speculated that longtime owners who have not experienced a recent market transaction may greatly overestimate the effect of EZ designation or the resulting neighborhood changes on the value of their house. On the other hand, renters who moved to the EZ more recently saw greater rent increases, suggesting that rents do rise, although only over a longer period.[14]

EZ Designation Was Not Random

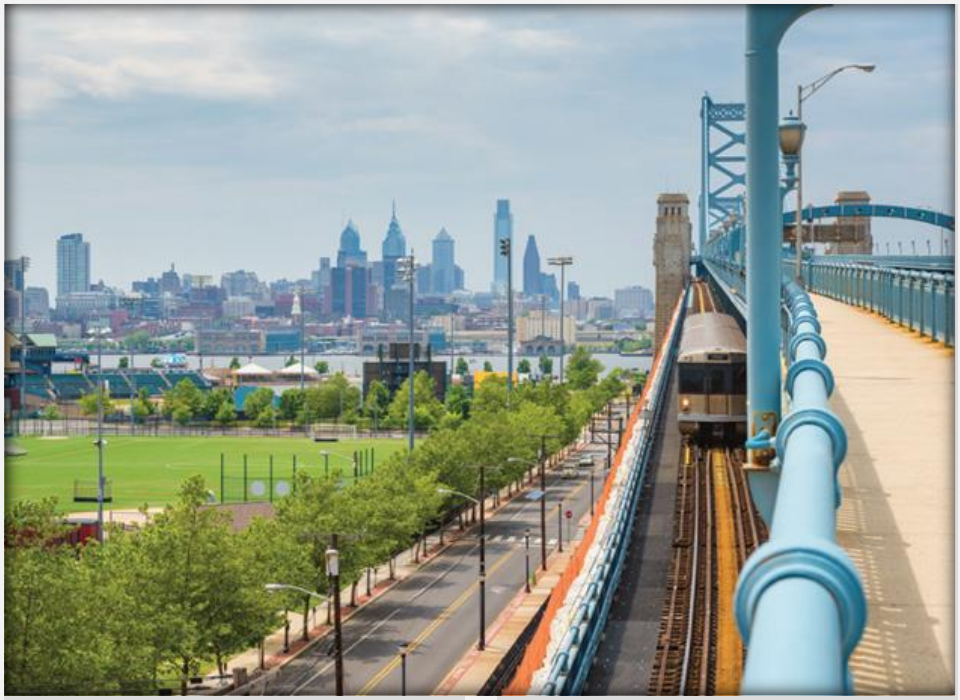
EZs and Enterprise Communities (ECs) were not randomly chosen. Their selection was based on applications, which encouraged localities to provide regulatory relief and take additional action. Therefore, any effect of EZs and ECs on the housing market is either indirect or a consequence of an optional state action, which makes

isolating the effect of EZ designation difficult. For example, a locality might have chosen to invest in sewer and transportation upgrades in certain areas to win EZ designation. Any housing development occurring there is more likely the result of local government investment rather than federal tax relief. On the other hand, designation, or the competition for designation, often will spur localities to take actions that may be beneficial and long overdue.

Hanson critiqued previous studies that had assumed that EZ designation was random.[15] Cities submitted applications, and EZ designations were assigned based on the merits of the applications. Many zones qualified for the designation, but few were approved. The zones that were designated were probably the ones most likely to show significant improvement without the EZ designation.

Hanson noted that the runner-up applicants for EZ designation were also highly qualified areas. Although they were probably less well positioned for wage growth or poverty reduction, they were more promising in those areas than a random area in the same city as an EZ with similar demographic statistics.

By comparing runner-up areas to the selected areas, Hanson found that EZ designation raised median property values by more than $100,000, which is both statistically and economically significant. Other studies showed large increases in employment and reductions in poverty in EZs but did not correct for the endogenous, or nonrandom, selection of EZs described above. For example, Busso, Gregory, and Kline found that employment in EZs increased between 12 and 21 percent and wages increased by 8 to 13 percent.[16] An evaluation commissioned by HUD showed similar results.[17]



The Philadelphia-Camden bistate Empowerment Zone was one of the six Round I urban zones designated in 1994.

However, this study found that, after accounting for the nonrandom selection of EZs, EZs may have had zero effect on employment rates and slightly increased poverty rates.

Some EZ Designations Came Later

Krupka and Noonan estimated a simultaneous equations model based on the different rounds of EZ designations and hedonic analysis of housing markets.[18] Hedonic analysis takes the characteristics of an item into account when determining its price; for example, hedonic analysis in housing will estimate house prices based on characteristics such as square footage, number of bathrooms, year of construction, school district, and distance to public transportation, among others.

Across six different formulations of the analysis, the authors found that EZs increased home prices between 10 and 40 percent. Because they used the hedonic approach, the authors could note several potential explanations. One possibility is that density decreased in EZ neighborhoods. The authors hypothesize that local governments spent grant money to demolish housing, which would increase the median value of the remaining homes. The authors note, however, that a more likely explanation is that the demand for commercial real estate increased, because commercial real estate in EZs would qualify for tax cuts.

These explanations have radically different implications. If the demolition hypothesis is correct, then median home prices may have increased, but the realities for people living in the remaining homes would not have changed. A national program to demolish vacant houses would increase median home prices in the absence of any tax or regulatory change, but such a program is unlikely to deliver real economic benefits to the country. If the commercial real estate hypothesis is correct, then economic activity may indeed have increased within EZs. Further study is needed to see whether the increased economic activity is primarily the result of existing

businesses and business activity relocating to EZs. If the goal of the EZ designation was to improve outcomes for EZ residents, then it would matter whether those relocating firms brought their employees with them or hired locally.

What About Renters?

Reynolds and Rohlin examined block group data in EZs and ECs.[19] Rather than examining means and medians, the authors plotted the distributions of rents and home values. Although the distribution of rent changed, the mean and median changed little; the percentage of households paying $600 or more per month in rent greatly increased, and the percentage of households paying $350 to $550 per month decreased. Although EZs were intended to benefit residents of low-income communities, this finding appears to show that EZ designation substantially increased their rents. These changes, however, occurred over a 20-year period, and some of this increase may be attributable to inflation. The remainder of the distribution, however, remains stable. In addition, the home value distribution showed that post-EZ home values were much more heavily concentrated over $100,000, and even over $300,000.

Evaluating Opportunity Zones

As the research above shows, future evaluators of Opportunity Zones have two major tasks:

Identify a comparison set of census tracts.

To qualify as an Opportunity Zone, a census tract must be either a low-income community as defined by the Internal Revenue Service or contiguous to a low-income community. However, the governors of each state selected only a subset of census tracts meeting the criteria for a low-income community. Moreover, each governor likely used different criteria in his or her selection. In other words, as with EZs, the selection of Opportunity Zones was not random. Any evaluation will have to carefully consider how to adjust for this nonrandom selection. Based on past methods, techniques such as propensity score matching of nearby tracts or comparing tracts that were narrowly selected for designation with those that were narrowly rejected may be options.

Identify data that can be used to track neighborhood change.

The research on enterprise zones and EZs focused on employment rates among area residents; the creation of jobs and businesses in the area; changes in land prices, home values, and rents; and changes in vacancy and poverty rates. These variables will likely be the same ones examined for Opportunity Zones.

Researchers may want to examine administrative data in addition to American Community Survey data. Administrative data are more available than they have ever been. Administrative data have two big advantages over survey data: they are not subject to sampling error, and the data can generally be obtained and analyzed much more quickly. These data also have two major flaws: they are not being collected for statistical purposes, so they may be biased, and only a small set of data points are available.

The administrative data points that HUD makes available capture the annual mobility of assisted housing tenants; because these data are constantly updated as tenants move, they can be an early indicator of neighborhood change. In addition, data from the U.S. Postal Service are updated every quarter and can capture changes in long-term vacant addresses, increases in total residential and business addresses (a sign of building permit activity), and changes in active addresses (a sign of residential and business lease-up).

Other administrative datasets that HUD and other researchers have used to measure neighborhood change include Home Mortgage Disclosure data,

Future evaluations of Opportunity Zones could examine neighborhood impact, including changes in home values and rents, using administrative datasets



which can show change in mortgage activity, characteristics of those applying for and receiving mortgages as well as the amount borrowed; county records data, which can show property sales transactions, changes in property values, and foreclosure activity at the census tract level; and data on employment from unemployment insurance records.

New sources of data should also be explored, such as "scraping" the Internet to gather information on advertised rents; using posts from social media sites such as Twitter to measure levels of happiness, sadness, and fear at small-area geographies; and collecting credit card company data that could show changes in retail purchasing patterns or even the creation of retailers at the neighborhood level.

One important source of data will be Qualified Opportunity Funds — in particular, the activities in which they are investing and the location of those investments. At the time of publication, final regulations on reporting requirements had not yet been issued. If investment data are made available, they will help researchers understand the impacts of specific types of investments. For example, if research indicates that the number of residential units in an Opportunity Zone has increased, it would be helpful to know whether Qualified Opportunity Funds were investing in residential property developments in neighborhoods that reflect this impact.

Both survey and administrative data at the census tract level are more available now than in the past. With careful controls to identify comparison neighborhoods and data on investments to help explain any findings (or nonfindings) of impact, effectively evaluating the impacts of Opportunity Zones should be possible.

Authored by: ***Daniel Marcin, HUD Staff***

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Newsletter Information

This newsletter is published by the Western Central Chapter (WCC) of the American Planning Association on a quarterly basis. Circulation is to the APA members of the WCC. The WCC Executive Committee welcomes submissions of original articles, editorial letters, project profiles, planners on the move items, calendar items, and any other information of interest to both professional and citizen planners. Submissions should be made to:

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