If necessity is the mother of invention, Minneapolis is a grand dame indeed! Innovative in the face of challenges, the city has developed 9.5 miles of enclosed 2nd story-level skyways connecting much of the city center. The skyway network is essentially a human “Habitrail” as described by one of our mobile workshop leaders. The extensive application of this design tool means that the community can enjoy enclosed living, working, and shopping space despite the region’s challenging winter. The city braces itself against temperatures that consistently fall (and like to stay) at 15 degrees below 0 throughout an extensive winter season. Minneapolis is a city that welcomes Spring!

Located by the mighty Mississippi, Minneapolis welcomed APA members from across the country for our annual conference in April. You couldn’t help but be charmed by its beauty and its people. Many Economic Development Division team members, there to attend the conference for ongoing education and networking opportunities, were thrilled to celebrate the beautiful Spring weather (it was warmer in Minneapolis during the entirety of NPC than in my hometown in California’s wine country that same week)!

This edition of News & Views celebrates your colleagues’ innovative approaches to challenging economic, housing, and equity issues. The conference began to feel like a planning charrette focusing on how to address shared concerns. As we met during classes and our EDD events, members discovered that many of our colleagues throughout the nation (and even international APA members) are experiencing similar and considerable challenges.

Common Challenges

1) Office vacancies associated with the “new normal” hybrid work culture.
2) Housing shortages associated with financial market issues and ongoing global population increases.*
3) Pervasive barriers to inclusivity — many planners expressed concern with homeless issues related to housing supply and lack of sufficient mental health and supportive services.

* Per the U.S. Census Bureau, over the past several years, there has been an average net annual increase in global population of 70 million people. This net increase is equivalent to adding a new country (or a new California And a new Texas) to the planet each year. That’s a lot of housing demand!

Financial Issues Impacting the Housing Sector

1) Interest rates are having a chilling effect on new housing development for many states and including other countries.
2) The flow of money through the

(continued on page 2)
The economy is slowed in the housing sector in general:

- Homeowners with existing low interest rate mortgages are experiencing a “golden handcuffs” effect, which is forcing them to stay rather than upgrade to a larger home or one in a preferred neighborhood.
- Flow is further impeded in this sector as people are not benefited by refinancing their mortgages.
- Construction sector economic multipliers are reduced commensurately.

3) Even with the limited housing supply, and related increases in home values, the higher interest rates mean that a property owner is not able to upgrade even if they have significant equity in their home.

For example, a homeowner selling a current home with a 3% interest rate could have as much as $150 thousand of gained equity from their current home to put as a down payment on a new home. Given current interest rates at double their existing rate, even with the offset of a substantial downpayment, the property owner would have to purchase a home of lesser value (size or less desirable neighborhood) than their existing home and end up with a new mortgage of an equivalent monthly payment.

Creative Solutions

During NPC, planners discussed ways to energize the housing sector, release the flow of money through the local economy, and provide housing through:

1) Conversion of office space to condominiums or apartments.
2) Reduction of zoning and permitting barriers to housing and accessory unit (in-law unit) production.
3) Fast tracking of renovation permits for homeowners that are choosing to stay in their home using their home equity to finance improvements.

Benefits include increase in home value as an investment for the homeowner and benefits to the jurisdiction of related property tax revenue increase.

4) Promotion of mixed-use projects and including temporary reduction in property taxes for developments of commercial sites when the developer agrees to cover the portion of site-supportive public infrastructure normally covered by the city or county.

5) Tax increment financing; use of funds to offset development costs / promote housing development where allowed by the state.

APA’s national conference can feel like one big workshop. It is exciting to hear how other planners are creatively solving shared issues. Like a project charrette, when attending an APA conference, you find yourself saying “that’s a great idea; I need to talk about this option with my colleagues back home!”
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Notes From The Chair

Awards and more!

by Emi Thériault, AICP, Chair, Economic Development Division

Many thanks to members who nominated projects illustrative of scalable planning solutions to planning and economic challenges. Many were selected for this year’s APA EDD Annual Awards program. During NPC’s Spring event, EDD provided an overview of these case studies in tandem with our Annual Business meeting. Congratulations to all the winners (see photos on page 5)!

Please enjoy this quarter’s articles, which include:

• This year’s Holzheimer Award winner, MIT’s Kareem El-Sisi, has provided a thought-provoking and scholarly proposal, explained in his article, “Growing Without Compromising: A Circular Approach to Sustainable Economic Development” (see page 9). His work contemplates a circular economy, a paradigm meant to reduce a community’s negative environmental footprint on the built environment while preserving its economy.

• aLocal Solutions President Eric Trevan worked together with the agency’s Vice President, Cate Hudson, and members of the Tonto Apache Tribe to provide an overview of this year’s Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Award-winning project. See their project overview, “Breaking Innovative Ground: aLocal and Apache Corners,” on page 7. This project used data-driven solutions employing AI econometric analytics tools to solve complex challenges for a multi-faceted project. The award-winning project addressed a Native American community’s complex site design and use needs for development of multiple community supportive uses and related development projects.

• Making way for our next leadership team, Immediate Past EDD Chair Sean Maguire’s article, “Will You Be the Next to Help Lead the Economic Development Division?” (see page 6), provides an overview of the top two EDD positions needed to lead the division. A ballot is coming to your inbox soon. But first, we need nominations for members to put on the ballot! Please take a moment to review Sean’s article and thoughtfully consider nominating yourself or a colleague whom you feel would be a good fit for the volunteer Chair and Treasurer-Secretary positions.

Congratulations to our 2024 Award Winners!

DONALD C. HUNTER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
aLOCAL / APACHE CORNERS

BEST PRACTICE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
WILLIAM H. GRAY III 30TH STREET STATION REDEVELOPMENT

INNOVATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CHILD CARE SPARK COALITION

STUDENT AWARD FOR BEST PRACTICE
SANIA CHANDRAI, EVA PHILLIPS & WILLIAM SNOW, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

HOLZHEIMER STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT
KAREEM EL-SISI, MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

HOLZHEIMER SCHOLARSHIP HONORABLE MENTIONS:
JEIN PARK, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
ANCHAL CHOPRA, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Economic Development Division Confers Awards at NPC/Minneapolis!

Best Practice in Economic Development:
William H. Gray III 30th Street Station Redevelopment

Amtrak has contracted with the Plenary Infrastructure Philadelphia (PIP) consortium to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the station improvements for the next 50 years as part of a public-private partnership (P3) agreement. Major elements of the station renovation include:

- modernizing and expanding station retail,
- consolidating station operations,
- upgrading The Porch landscaping and community amenities,
- modernizing Amtrak corporate offices,
- enhancing building infrastructure to achieve and maintain a “state of good repair.”

Innovation in Economic Development:
Childcare Spark Coalition

Childcare SPARK is a first-of-its-kind combination of early childhood education best practices combined with business accelerator resources to create in-home childcare businesses across Marquette County, MI. The program is managed via a diverse coalition of partners with the goal is tackling a critical barrier to workforce participation for families.

Student Award for Best Practice:
Sania Chandrani, Eva Phillips & William Snow, New York University

Through in-depth legal, financial, and policy analysis, this project provides recommendations for how New York City can promote the conversion of offices to mixed-income housing. It argues that conversions present a unique opportunity to bring affordable housing to high-opportunity neighborhoods, furthering the city’s fair housing goals.
Will You Be the Next to Help Lead the Economic Development Division?

by Sean Maguire, AICP CEdC, Immediate Past Chair

The Economic Development Division is supported by an outstanding team of volunteers each day. Behind and supporting them all are the Division’s elected officers. Every two years, the membership elects two of its own to lead and serve: Chair-elect and Secretary/Treasurer. Are you ready to step up to the challenge?

We are preparing to open nominations for these two positions through the APAs consolidated election cycle. If you are interested in serving, please watch for the opportunity to submit your name for consideration. Elections are held later in 2024 and administered by APA and its election vendor. In the meantime, here is what you need to know about our two elected positions.

• The **Chair-elect** is a multi-year commitment that includes two years as Chair-elect and working with the current Chair to assist them with the Division’s work; two years as Chair leading the Division and its team; and two years as Immediate Past Chair to help with a consistent transition and overall continuity. Responsibilities include ensuring that the Division serves its members consistent with our by-laws, participating in national Divisions Council meetings both remotely and in-person (some financial support may be provided for travel), and committing to our Division’s tradition of leadership and excellence in the American Planning Association.

• The **Secretary/Treasurer** works closely with the Chair, Chair-elect, and Immediate Past Chair in a two-year commitment to support the administration of the Division including its annual budget, meetings summaries and minutes, and prompt payment of any bills or reimbursements incurred by the Division in its work.

Not ready for an election but still interested in serving? We have a number of other ways to get involved through our committees. Contact us at info_EDD@planning.org to learn more or visit economic.planning.org.

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**CHAIR (2023-24):**
Emi Thériault, AICP
County of Sonoma, CA
emi.theriault@gmail.com

**CHAIR-ELECT (2023-24):**
Morgan Wortham
ICSC
mwortham@icsc.com

**SECRETARY-TREASURER (2023-24):**
Sharmili Reddy, AICP
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Breaking Innovative Ground: aLocal and Apache Corners

Apache Corners, a project by aLocal, was selected as the 2024 Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Planning Award recipient. This Award is named in memory of Donald E. Hunter, who was a long-time and very active member of the American Planning Association, always urging greater attention for economic development planning. He was President of Hunter Interests Inc., and served as a board member of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the International Downtown Association (IDA).

This year’s Hunter Award winner, aLocal, has grown significantly over the past five years and is leaving their mark on a true “data to development project.” While building their netEI economic impact software, aLocal has supported the economic development efforts of several clients. Once the Tonto Apache Nation used aLocal, they asked the company to stay on and develop Apache Corners. Chairman Calvin Johnson of the Tonto Apache Nation said, “Culture is the catalyst of our vision. Economic development supports the future progress of our Nation, which benefits the entire region!” This includes the Tonto Apache nation as well as surrounding municipalities of Payson and Starr Valley and the State of Arizona.

Apache Corners is a multi-year community and economic planning effort by the Tonto Apache Nation. Beginning in 2020, Tonto Apache focused on what economic opportunities existed that would benefit their Nation’s economy and benefit the region. Approximately 75 acres on the reservation will be used to build the future Tonto Apache economy and are slated for development with an effort to capture dollars leaking outside the economy and stimulate not only the Tonto Apache economy, but the entire region.

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**Breaking Ground, cont. from p. 7**

The total development is slated for a mixed-use approach focused on building an economy from their initial businesses with the Tonto Apache government, Mazatlán Casino and Hotel, Convenience Store and Tire Shop. Future developments in the first phase will include an entertainment district with a distillery and additional restaurants, dispensary, improve the east side convenience store, a family entertainment center and infrastructure improvements. The second phase of the development will focus on a west side convenience store, community health center, training and educational partnership, grocery store, warehousing, and light manufacturing. The total impacts to the Tonto Apache Nation and regional economy are significant!

**Apache Corners**
- $50MM Initial Investment
- $200MM Total Investment Estimate
- 5 Years

**Net Economic Impact (netEI) Phase 1**
- Economic Impact $89.2MM
- Employment (New) 1,043
- New Wages $30.5MM
- Tax Impact $9.1MM

aLocal President and Investor Eric S. Trevan, PhD, truly believes in the mission of aLocal. “We are here to change the way all economic decisions are made,” he said. “By making analytics accessible, available, affordable, and accurately represent the community differentiates us from the other county-based system. We are focused on creating solutions and parity that focus on data equity, data sovereignty, good data, and data diplomacy.”

Approximately 75 acres on the reservation are slated for development with an effort to capture dollars leaking outside the economy and stimulate not only the Tonto Apache economy, but the entire region.

aLocal launched their netEI economic impact suite focused on ease of use, affordability, and drawing a ground swell of users. Forecasting not only economic impact, but also revenue, employment and economic leakage estimates, netEI also provides insight into predicted market demand, profit and loss as well as balance sheets with other key financial ratios. Results are provided in tables as well as exportable GIS shape files and spatial data. Additionally, aLocal offers geospatial, planning, and research services as well as software development. With high aspirations, aLocal looks to provide service to over 80,000 government units, including Native nations, economic development corporations, municipal government, universities, consultants, and planning organizations.

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Eric Trevan, Sageous Suggs, Breanna Fulton, and Komal Macwan accept the Donald E. Hunter Excellence in Economic Development Planning Award for Apache Corners at the National Planning Conference in Minnesota.
Economic Development Division Announces Scholarship Winners

We are pleased to announce the winner of the 2024 EDD Holzheimer Memorial Student Scholarship. Kareem El-Sisi of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) submitted the winning paper, titled “Growing Without Compromising: A Circular Approach to Sustainable Economic Development.” The paper discusses a timely topic on circular economy and specifically explores the strategies to transition from a linear to a circular approach in the built environment to achieve sustainable economic development. Kareem’s paper offers useful case studies and helpful practical recommendations for economic development practitioners to embrace the principles of circular economy and create more livable, sustainable communities while fostering economic prosperity. An extended summary of this paper appears here.

Honorable Mentions

The committee also acknowledged the following submissions with “Honorable Mention” designation:

- **Jein Park**, of Harvard University, submitted the paper titled “Managing Retail Vacancy in Harvard Square.”

Summaries of these two papers will appear in the future issues of the Economic Development Division’s newsletter.

2024 Scholarship Committee

The 2024 Holzheimer Scholarship committee was comprised of: Dr. Li (Kerry) Fang of Florida State University (Chair); Dr. Greg Schrock of Portland State University; Dr. Henry Renski of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Corey Proctor of Forrest County, Mississippi; Katie McConnell of City of Richmond Department of Economic Development; and Emily Egan of the City of Elmhurst, Illinois. Thank you for the committee members’ hard work!

Growing Without Compromising: A Circular Approach to Sustainable Economic Development

by Kareem H. El-Sisi

“Cities are humanity’s greatest invention,”1 as the built environment we live in is man-made, therefore, the impacts on the environment are partially a result of human decisions. In a rapidly developing economy and rising demand for sustainability, economic development faces a dilemma of compromise. If human decisions shape outcomes of the future, how can we make decisions that benefit the economy and environment without compromising growth or sustainability? Adopting a circular approach will be one of the strongest resolutions to this dilemma.

Through a circular economy, we can reduce the negative environmental footprint on the built environment while preserving, if not growing, its economy. This would lead to a more equitable approach toward the economy’s future, making cities more livable and productive.

The Dilemma of Sustainable Economic Development

Everything that humans utilize which is physical, regardless of scale, requires the use of raw materials and natural resources. The built environment is the largest physical product — a multi-faceted creation that impacts and determines the health of all adjacent industries. There’s an ongoing evolution in the global demographic through a growing population with an increasingly heightened rate of consumption, putting an unprecedented amount of pressure on natural resources.² To counter this pressure there has been a boost in global environmental regulation, which has impacted the industries’ free market and has made it more difficult to supply the demands of the people. These regulations aren't sustainable economically, as the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”³ The circular approach resolves this due to its focus on adding value to the economy

WINNER

2024 EDD Holzheimer Memorial Student Scholarship

Kareem H. El-Sisi

(continued on page 10)
through adding strength, flexibility, and prolongation, which would also be beneficial for the environment.

**The Circular Approach to Economic Growth**

The traditional economy follows a linear approach to natural resources, where materials are sourced, made use of, and then disposed of as waste, leading to multiple negative externalities which eventually results in a value gap. The circular approach decouples economic growth from resource consumption, such that outputs are designed to be more durable and reusable, enabling a repetitive loop where maximum intrinsic value is maintained and negative externalities are detained. This approach solves more than resource devaluation while increasing human productivity and social welfare, sealing the value gap and generating total value.

**Understanding and Reversing the Value Gap: Unforeseen Losses**

To measure the value of a finished product within the built environment and infrastructure, a cost-benefit analysis is typically conducted to understand the direct impacts of the project. The issue is that these analyses tend to overlook the indirect, extended consequences and do not consider the wider benefits. While a project might seem to hold value monetary-wise, it can hold risks and outcomes that will generate new negative externalities.

**The Circular ReSOLVE Framework**

The circular approach has been popularized by the efforts of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which formed the ReSOLVE (Regenerate, Share, Optimize, Loop, Virtualize, and Exchange) framework for achieving a circular economy.

**Application of the Circular Approach to the Built Environment**

The built environment is a multifaceted entity, incorporating everything from the small buildings that exist within it to the city landscape as a whole. Demands will continue to increase as cities are on the rise with increasing populations that require more housing and services. Integrating the circular approach to each level of scale within the built environment is essential to creating an ecosystem that generates value for the economy and protection for the environment.

**Challenges and Limitations**

The Circular economy poses thermodynamic limits as processes such as recycling and remanufacturing inherently consume resources and produce waste, challenging the notion of complete sustainability and feasibility. It can also have spatial-related complications with short-term shifts causing unforeseen long-term consequences that cannot be pre-determined. The success of a circular approach depends on the effective ability to convince, lead, and manage a variety of stakeholders, each of which must be completely aligned and actively contributing their part.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research highlights the methods and benefits of adopting a circular approach for the built environment at its different levels. Through this approach, a sustainable future that does not compromise economic

(continued on page 11)
growth or environmental well-being can be achieved. The shift towards a circular economy from a linear economy leads to higher profits for stakeholders, improvements in the health and well-being of the people, and less pressure on the environment’s natural resources. The result is more livable communities with an equal chance of sustaining their needs in the future.

— Kareem H. El-Sisi is a Master of City Planning and Master of Computational Science and Engineering student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with a background in urban planning, economics, and data science. He is a researcher at the Senseable City Lab focused on projects that deliver impact and shape a better world. Kareem can be reached at elsisi@mit.edu.

Endnotes: