



American Planning Association
Economic Development Division

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NEWS & VIEWS

A publication of the Economic Development Division of the American Planning Association

Fall 2025

Rural Roots, Urban Growth: The Evolution of Bondurant's Grain District

by Maggie Murray

Bondurant, Iowa —

an Iowa Great Place located at the north-eastern edge of the Des Moines Metropolitan Area — is undergoing a remarkable transformation. Originally established as a small railroad and agricultural hub, this growing community of nearly 10,000 residents experienced a 91% increase in population between 2010 and 2020 and has embraced its past while forging a bold path forward. This surge is driven by the city's commuter-friendly location, the creation of over 4,000 jobs since 2017, and a commitment to preserving the community's hometown charm.

At the heart of this evolution is the Grain District Downtown Redevelopment Plan, an innovative blueprint that unites historic preservation with economic revitalization. "The Grain District is where our history and future come together to create something truly special," said Mayor Doug Elrod. Informed by community feedback gathered through Planning & Zoning and City Council meetings, and shaped with ISG Inc.'s expertise, the plan was adopted by the Bondurant City Council in February 2024. It sets forth the redevelopment of a 25-acre grain cooperative site into a vibrant



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mixed-use district that showcases Bondurant's leadership in adaptive reuse, placemaking, and sustainable growth. The Grain District Groundbreaking event in July 2025 celebrated the start of both public and private improvements, kicking off the district's long-anticipated redevelopment efforts.

A Vision for Revitalization

After the farming cooperative's departure, the site sat underutilized, prompting the 2022 Building Bondurant Plan to call for bold redevelopment. To lay the groundwork, the City commissioned a Grain Elevator Feasibility Assessment, which confirmed the potential to reuse key silo clusters. Building on those findings, the City partnered with [The 101 LLC](#) and [ISG Inc.](#) to create the award-winning Grain District Downtown Redevelopment

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The Grain District Groundbreaking event in July 2025 celebrated the start of both public and private improvements, kicking off the district's long-anticipated redevelopment efforts.

Notes From The Chair



I'm proud to share this edition of *News & Views*, which highlights the incredible work happening across our field. One of our top priorities this season is hearing directly from our members. We're launching our **2025 Member Survey** to better understand your interests, needs, and ideas. Whether you're a longtime member or newly joined, your voice matters. The survey will help guide our educational programming, communications, and professional development opportunities in the year ahead. Please take a few minutes to complete it and encourage your colleagues to do the same!

This issue also spotlights some of our **2025 EDD Award winners**, which were recognized at NPC earlier this year and are now featured in more depth:

- The City of Bondurant, Iowa's Grain District Redevelopment Plan is an example of rural revitalization through adaptive reuse and placemaking.

As always, thank you for being part of the APA Economic Development Division. Your participation is what makes our EDD community so great.

- In Portsmouth, Virginia, the new Innovation District Plan is reimagining a historically disinvested corridor into a walkable community focused on home-grown job creation, sustainability, and equity.

These projects reflect the kind of innovation, community focus, and strategic planning that we aim to elevate through this division, and

we hope they'll spark new economic development ideas in your own communities.

We're also pleased to share that the Communications Committee has released an **RFP for a communications partner** to support our newsletter and digital outreach beginning in 2026. If you or someone in your network is experienced in digital publications and nonprofit communications, we encourage you to share the opportunity.

As always, thank you for being part of the APA Economic Development Division. Your participation is what makes our EDD community so great.

Wishing you a productive and inspiring fall season! 🍂

— Morgan Wortham

Please Participate in our Member Survey!

Every two years, the Economic Development Division of the American Planning Association surveys its members to determine how its members assess the Division's performance and preferences.

Your response is important to the Division and its leadership. Please take a few minutes to complete this **brief survey** by October 31, 2025.



American Planning Association Economic Development Division

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RURAL ROOTS, URBAN GROWTH, CONT.

Plan — a community-driven vision that blends preservation with progress. The plan establishes a strategic framework for public and private investment, calling for select silos to be repurposed into a hotel and condominiums while also introducing new residential, commercial, and recreational spaces to bring fresh energy to the area.

Unlocking Private Investment Opportunities

The Grain District Downtown Redevelopment Plan serves as an economic catalyst by providing the vision to create nearly 300,000 square feet of retail, office, dining, and residential space along new and

(continued on page 4)



Construction begins on this 25-acre grain cooperative site on its journey to becoming a vibrant mixed-use district that showcases Bondurant's leadership in adaptive reuse, placemaking, and sustainable growth.



Adopted in February 2024, the Grain District Downtown Redevelopment Plan envisions a connected, vibrant extension of Bondurant's downtown, blending historic preservation with modern development.



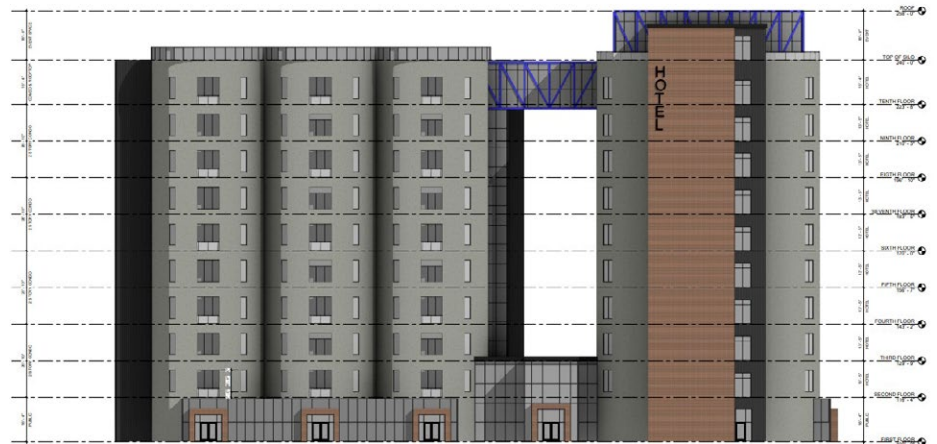
Left: A vision for Lincoln Street NE extension in the Grain District, designed to complement downtown Bondurant's character with pedestrian-friendly spaces and cohesive, mixed-use development.

Below: A visionary concept for the Grain District, transforming historic grain elevators into a dynamic hotel, condominium, and event space, preserving Bondurant's skyline while fostering redevelopment.

RURAL ROOTS, URBAN GROWTH, CONT.

reconstructed streets in the community's core. The plan is already drawing private investment, with T12 Distillery leading as the first major redevelopment project.

T12 Distillery, scheduled to open in mid-2026, will repurpose three massive grain silos into a craft distillery, featuring a speakeasy-style tasting room and patio, with plans for a future event space. "By repurposing these towering grain silos, we're not just building a distillery — we're breathing new life into a landmark," said Scott Turczynski, founder and owner of T12 Distillery. With its unique setting and offerings, the distillery is poised to become a regional destination and anchor for the district, attracting both residents and visitors to experience Bondurant's revitalized downtown.



CONCEPTUAL ELEVATION - NORTH

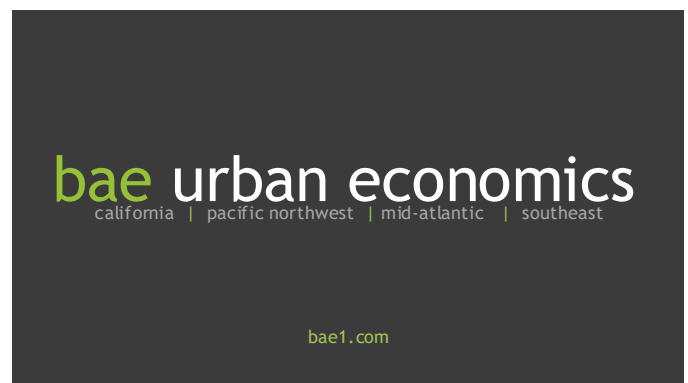
Strategic Community Investment

The City of Bondurant is committed to making meaningful investments that enhance the heart of the community, with several Grain District-area public improvements now under construction. These projects include the Lincoln Street extension, which will improve connectivity, create space for new storefronts, and

expand public parking. In addition, the Chichaqua Valley Trail is being extended through the district along a former railroad bed, complemented by an arboretum with a canopy of trees to enrich the sense of place and natural beauty.

A highlight of the district's upgrades is Silo Commons, a

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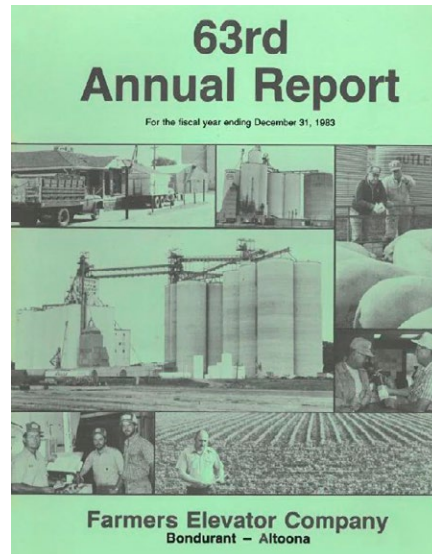


RURAL ROOTS, URBAN GROWTH, CONT.

landmark public space slated for construction in 2026. Plans feature an amphitheater beside a silo pack, a lawn accommodating up to 850 guests, a direct tie to the regional trail, and potential for a vertical rock-climbing wall on a silo face. A large silo mural is also planned, providing a dynamic backdrop to the amphitheater and enhancing the space as a lively hub for culture and recreation.

Access and Connectivity

Beyond its economic and aesthetic benefits, the plan emphasizes accessibility and seamless connections, aligning with the City's adopted slogan, Life Connecting. A standout district example is T12 Distillery, designed with universal accessibility at its core. Founder Scott Turczynski, who sustained a spinal cord injury affecting his T12 vertebra, is committed to ensuring that all visitors can fully experience the distillery without barriers. With ADA-compliant features and a focus on thoughtful design, T12 Distillery demonstrates how redevelopment can



The 1983 Farmers Elevator Company Annual Report highlights Bondurant's iconic grain elevators, showcasing deep agricultural roots and historic ties to grain storage and farming.

enhance accessibility while creating spaces that are both economically vibrant and inviting to all.

A Blueprint for the Future

The Grain District Downtown Redevelopment Plan is more than a

local success story; it stands as a best practice in planning, showing how rural communities can inspire growth while preserving their character. By leveraging historic preservation, economic innovation, and strategic public-private partnerships, Bondurant is setting a national example for how small cities can redefine their downtowns for modern living. As implementation moves forward, the Grain District will not only revitalize a dormant site but also enhance quality of life for all Bondurant residents, ensuring the community's rural roots continue to fuel its urban growth for generations to come. 🏡

— Maggie Murray is the Planning & Community Development Director for the City of Bondurant, Iowa. She is a certified planner through the American Planning Association's American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and received the Distinguished Leadership Award from the Iowa Chapter of APA in 2020. Maggie welcomes reader feedback at planning@cityofbondurant.com.



Set to open in mid-2026, T12 Distillery will repurpose historic grain elevators, serving as a key anchor for Bondurant's Grain District redevelopment.



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City of Portsmouth, VA — Innovation District Plan

by Jason Epley, AICP

In a major step towards reshaping its future, the City of Portsmouth recently adopted the Innovation District plan, which is intended to transform Uptown Portsmouth's High Street into a dynamic and sustainable urban neighborhood. Led by consultants from [Benchmark Planning](#) of Charlotte, NC, the plan was developed through an inclusive planning process that spanned from the spring of 2022 through winter 2024, this visionary initiative was built with extensive input from local residents, business owners, and stakeholders, ensuring the plan reflects the community's aspirations.

The Innovation District's guiding vision is to create a vibrant, walkable, and mixed-use environment where Portsmouth's diverse and creative workforce can live, work, and interact. The area will serve as a thriving hub for entrepreneurship, offering opportunities for local job creation, innovation, and sustainable growth. The plan, which was adopted by the Portsmouth City Council in September 2024, aims to foster a culture of collaboration and accessibility, where people of all backgrounds can contribute to and benefit from the area's revitalization.

Key goals of the Innovation District plan include:

Goal 1: Grow Our Own Jobs — Focus on creating opportunities for local residents to launch and grow businesses

within the district, addressing the community's desire to develop homegrown talent and avoid relying solely on outside recruitment.

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Goal 2: Develop the “Greenest” Street in Hampton Roads — Design High Street to be a model of sustainability, featuring green infrastructure, energy-efficient buildings, and eco-friendly public spaces.

Goal 3: Create a Great Place — Build an engaging, attractive, and accessible urban environment where people are encouraged to gather, interact, and share ideas.

Goal 4: Build an Equitable Community — Prioritize social equity by improving economic opportunities for underserved communities and addressing historical socio-economic disparities.

One of the central themes of community workshops was the desire to “grow our own jobs.” Participants emphasized that local talent should be cultivated within Portsmouth, providing avenues for residents to become entrepreneurs or engage in innovative careers right in their own community. The Innovation District is divided into

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Development Focus Areas within the Innovation District.

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, VA, CONT.

three sub-areas, each contributing to the success of the district as a whole:

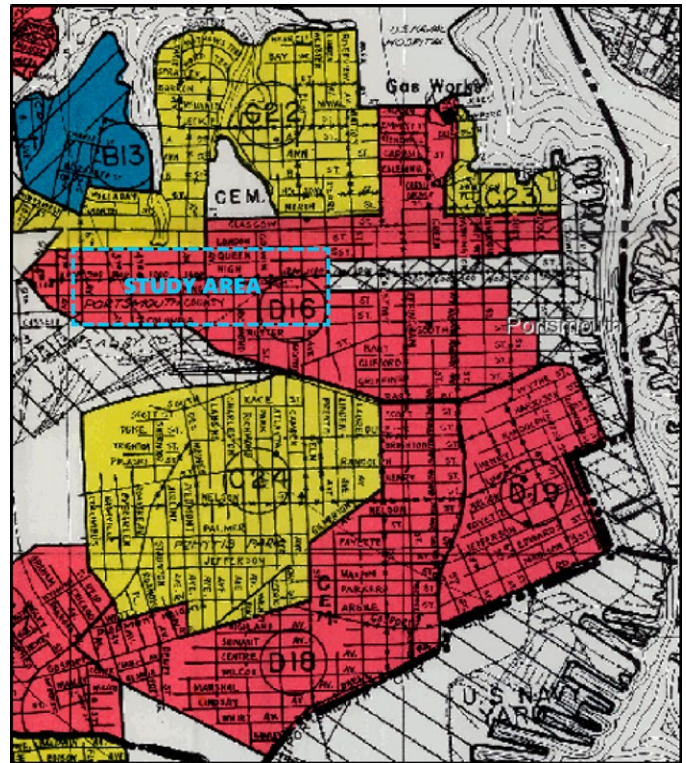
Maker Square: A creative and entrepreneurial space for makers, artists, and residents to collaborate, with a focus on arts, entertainment, and small business growth.

Health and Wellness Square: A hub for health and wellness services, supporting the district's existing offerings and improving residents' access to healthcare.

MLK Gateway: Serving as the entrance to the district, this area will feature public art, craft industrial spaces, green spaces under the highway overpass, and amenities such as a covered skate park and an outdoor market.

Historically, the Innovation District was labeled as “hazardous” during the 1930s by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation’s redlining policies, leading to decades of neglect and underinvestment. The plan’s “Build an Equitable Community” goal is specifically designed to address these past injustices by providing new opportunities for economic mobility and improving the quality of life for current residents. A key feature of the plan is support for small businesses, especially in underserved communities, by reducing startup costs and offering mentoring opportunities.

The creation of a makerspace and supportive infrastructure will be pivotal in providing residents, especially



The study area is located within an area that was considered to be “hazardous” by Home Owner’s Loan Corporation since the area was predominantly an African American neighborhood.

young people, with the skills, resources, and networks needed to succeed as entrepreneurs. The Innovation District is designed to be an inclusive, thriving environment where anyone can test new ideas, access business resources, and contribute to the area’s future growth.

The Innovation District is more than just a physical redevelopment plan; it’s a blueprint for a brighter, more

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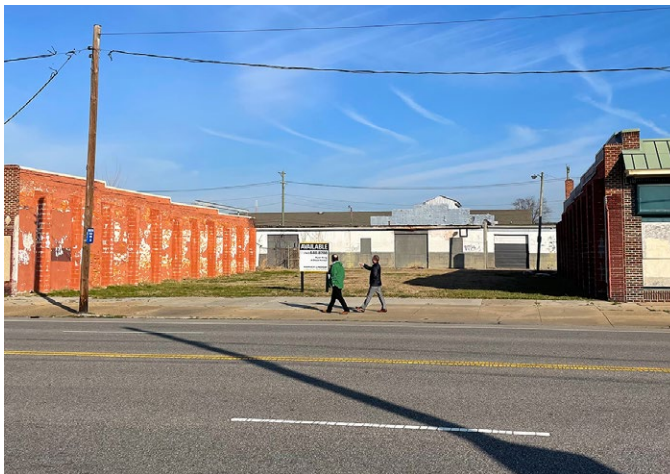
Residents providing direction for the Innovation District Plan.



Public Meeting Input into the Innovation District Plan.



Aerial view of the High Street corridor at the heart of the city's innovation district, which was named “The LINC” earlier this year to begin implementing the identity and branding recommendations of the Plan.



HighStreet — before and after.

The Innovation District is more than just a physical redevelopment plan; it's a blueprint for a brighter, more inclusive future for Portsmouth. Through this plan, the City is creating a space where innovation, opportunity, and equity intersect, fostering a community that works for everyone.




CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, VA, CONT.

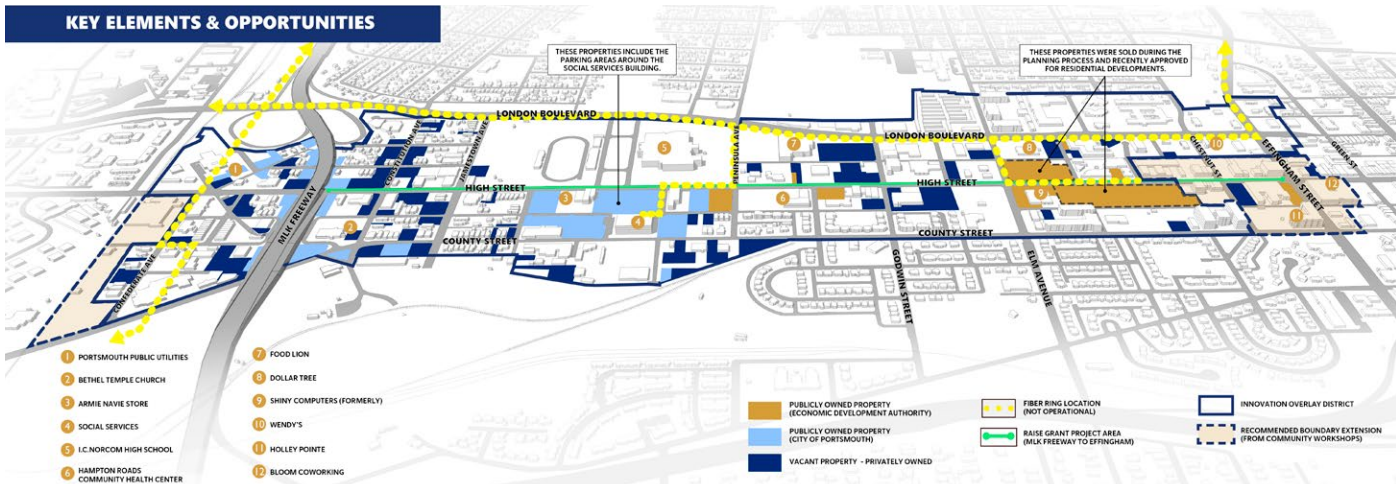
inclusive future for Portsmouth. Through this plan, the City is creating a space where innovation, opportunity, and equity intersect, fostering a community that works for everyone.

As Portsmouth moves forward with the implementation of this transformative vision, it aims to set a new standard for urban revitalization — one that balances economic growth with social responsibility and environmental sustainability. The Innovation District is poised to become a model for other cities, demonstrating that vibrant, equitable communities can thrive with the right mix of

innovation, collaboration, and forward-thinking planning.

For more information on the Innovation District plan, visit www.portsmouthva.gov/2175/Innovation-District. 

— Jason Epley, AICP, is the president of Benchmark Planning, a national urban planning and design firm based in Charlotte. Jason leads a wide variety and complexity of consulting projects, which includes a number of urban design, economic development, and community improvement projects. Jason has additional expertise and experience with downtown development, serving in the role of Executive Director of the North Carolina Downtown Development Association since 2011.





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Where Should Economic Development Live?

by Amalia Cunningham, AICP

Economic developers in local government are all over the place, organizationally speaking. They can be found nestled in the City Manager's Office (CMO), marooned in Planning, or parked in the department that had a free desk at the moment they were hired. There's very seldom a sense that the spot was thoughtfully selected in the context of the specific organization.

If an agency has chosen to invest its scarce resources in economic development, it's essential to set the team up for success by giving it the right organizational home. Forward-thinking agencies should weigh each of these four critical factors to ensure the most effective placement of the economic development function:

- Agency size
- Strategic plan
- Budget, funding, and influence of the private sector
- Role of electeds

Size

A small agency (I'll use "city" throughout for convenience) has fewer than 100 employees with streamlined bureaucracy. With only one or two economic development staff, it makes sense to have the function housed in the CMO, keeping clear lines of communication and minimizing senior management's workload.

In a midsize city, with 100 to 500-ish employees, the ombudsperson role becomes more important as the bureaucracy grows. Permit processes might be perceived as slower, with more regulatory hurdles; it's time to consider placing economic development within the planning department. It's useful to have embedded project advocates. The collegial relationships developed through breakroom chats and potlucks can lead to better outcomes, than the city manager's representative descending from the second floor to tell the planners what to do. The downside is being a layer removed from the decision-makers...but sometimes it's a good thing not to be caught at your desk when the mayor wanders in to pick up her mail.

In a city with more than 500 employees, it's reasonable to consider a stand-alone department with a head who has significant decision-making authority. Large agencies usually have multiple complex development projects underway, and enough institutional credibility and budget to merit department status.



Amalia Cunningham

In a big city with multiple complex projects, a stand-alone economic development department or agency makes sense.

Strategic Plan

If there's consensus on one or more big projects (like base re-use), codified in a strategic plan, this points toward putting economic development in the CMO for good accountability, support, and communication with electeds.

Without obvious flagship projects, if there's a strategic plan that prioritizes business climate and small business support, this suggests a home in Planning. Absent a strategic plan, look to other guiding documents for high-level goals for growth, jobs, etc. If there's nothing at all, getting formal direction becomes a high priority. It doesn't have to be a plan that takes an expensive consultant two years to complete. It can be a two-page staff report, laying out the economic development goals for the next two years, and adding a recommendation for the best organizational home.

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WHERE SHOULD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LIVE?, CONT.

Budget, Funding, and Influence of the Private Sector

One distinctive aspect of economic development is partnership with the private sector. Economic developers have to be comfortable with generally supporting local businesses. Sometimes that support goes both ways, with the private sector contributing funds for dedicated programs which can influence the organizational home. Or if the local business community has a hostile relationship with the planning department, it might be better to move economic development under the city manager or as a stand-alone department. This might even lead to a quasi-independent agency like an Economic Development Corporation if the private funding stream is large and sustained.

Wild Card: Local Electeds

While elected officials always want to be involved, cities with a strong mayor will see a higher level of engagement. While there are strategies to channel this energy into productive results, for the purposes of an organizational assessment, consider the options of a direct report to the city manager in smaller cities or stand-alone department



Amalia Cunningham

If small business support is a strategic priority, consider placing economic development in the planning department.

in bigger cities. Even cities without a strong mayor can get strong personalities on the dais; weigh the organizational culture around staff-Council communication and staff's political savvy when thinking about how electeds' wants play into the location of the function.

Discussing these factors hopefully sparked recognition that your organization has thoughtfully established its economic development function, or if not, created an opportunity to open a conversation about improved effectiveness in your context. ■

— Amalia Cunningham, AICP, is an economic development and organizational development consultant, with more than 20 years of experience as local government staff and running her own consulting small business. She can be reached through amaliacunninghamconsulting.com.

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 Tess M. Rine..... Buffalo, NY

Christopher D. Barboza..... Carthage, NY
 Ermeen Shahbaz..... Ithaca, NY
 Nicole Burek..... Jackson Heights, NY
 Tahreem Akif..... New York, NY
 Isabella Devereaux New York, NY
 Valentine M. Kalei..... New York, NY
 Ayomikun Oluyadi New York, NY
 Maria Sarria New York, NY
 Kristen L. Brewer Painted Post, NY
 Aderanti Ireti Adebukola Cincinnati, OH
 Daniel R. Chaitkin..... Cincinnati, OH
 Noah DeRochie..... Columbus, OH
 James A. Settle..... Reynoldsburg, OH
 Aidan Byers..... Norman, OK
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 Nicole McDonald Philadelphia, PA
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 Xinyuan O. Zhang Philadelphia, PA
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 Luke S. Godbold..... Cayce, SC
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 Tarun Sabavath..... Hyderabad, Telangana
 Chelsea Arvin..... Mount Juliet, TN
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 Benjamin C. Simmons Boerne, TX
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 Devon T. Young Vonderscher Frisco, TX
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 Joshua Lathan..... Houston, TX
 Redmond A. Neely..... Houston, TX
 Uzra Fatima Syeda..... Houston, TX
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 Nicolas C. Williams..... Irving, TX
 Miesha Johnson Jersey Village, TX
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 Jack J. Joyce..... San Antonio, TX
 Ashley N. Ritchey..... Schertz, TX
 Rebecca Gourley..... Orem, UT
 Dina Williams Blaes..... Taylorsville, UT
 Anugya Shandilya..... Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
 Lisa D. Scott Aberdeen, WA
 Michael J. Rizzitiello..... College Place, WA
 Duncan Fields Federal Way, WA
 Angel L. Torres..... Port Angeles, WA
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 JungHoo Yeo..... Seattle, WA
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Meet EDD Leadership

In each News & Views edition we will profile a member of the EDD leadership team.

Chris Mefford, AICP

Education & Training Chair

Education: BA Math & Economics, Univ. of Northern Iowa; MS Urban & Regional Planning, Univ. of Iowa; Masters in Business Administration, Univ. of Washington

Title & Organization: President & CEO, [Community Attributes Inc. \(CAI\)](#)

Location: Seattle, Denver, Memphis

Lightning Round: Get to Know Chris

Current project you're most excited about?

We're producing regional economic forecast scenarios for the greater Memphis region, for the MidSouth Development District. The analysis will provide a reliable reference for planners and economic developers to align strategies.

For the Columbia River Economic Development Council, we curated data on near-term and long-term land for major employment uses, and we published the sites on an interactive map online. We did this for them five years ago and all of those sites were acquired for development within five years.



Chris regularly gives talks linking global and national trends to regional economies to inform strategic planning.

What's a challenge in your work that others might relate to?

Small business consulting is not for everyone. Our success depends on week-to-week time management, and month-to-month project management. And those efforts need to align with our longer-term vision and goals. Maintaining that rhythm is critical to move toward those goals.

What's one policy, tool, or idea more people should be talking about?

We preach that the foundation of economic development is community development. Cities and regions need to focus on being a good place, first and foremost, and taking care of the businesses and workers that they have already as their best bets for economic growth. With those foundations in mind, then by all means get the word out and go after what you want.

One small (or big) win from the past year?

We are celebrating our 20th anniversary at CAI this year. It's been a year of reflection, appreciation and renewal, along with a couple of great parties.

If someone wants to collaborate or learn more, how should they reach out?

Join the EDD! Participate in our webinars, make sure you're on our newsletters (the APA EDD newsletter).

What's your "why" for volunteering time on the EDD Executive Committee?

The nexus of planning and economic development is an under-nurtured strategic space. I'm grateful to collaborate with like-minded volunteers and thought partners to explore how to define that nexus to help communities thrive.

Just for Fun

What is your favorite city to visit?

At the moment, it's St. Louis. One of the most under-appreciated cities in America, in my judgment.

Favorite quote related to economic development, planning, or cities?

"The data will set you free." (Alan Mulally, when he was Ford Motor Co. CEO)

Best thing you've ever seen repurposed or adaptively reused?

Crosstown Concourse in Memphis; former Sears Roebuck warehouse. 🏢