# PLANNING MINNESOTA

A Publication of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association

American Planning Association
Minnesota Chapter

*Making Great Communities Happen*

Spring-Summer 2026



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## Inside this Issue

**Chapter Updates**
President's Desk.....Page 3
Women in Planning Update.....Page 4

**District News**
Southwest District Update.....Page 5
Planning Through the Black Mirror.....Page 7

**Chapter Events**
Spring Workshop.....Page 8

**Resources and Reports**
Selected Resources.....Page 10
Jobs and RFPs.....Page 12





**Planning Through the Black Mirror** Page 7

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA MN) publishes this newsletter on a semi-annual basis.

Submissions: We welcome articles, letters to the editor, photos, calendar items, project profiles, planners on the move items, and other news. Send all submissions via e-mail

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# PRESIDENT'S DESK

**Planning Through Uncertainty**



Many of you are entering a season that comes only once a decade: comprehensive planning season. Although the planning process may last three years, the work you do will shape our communities for decades to come.

As planners, we balance today's immediate needs with the uncertain needs of the future. Much of our day-to-day work involves responding to pressing issues, but the comprehensive planning process gives us an important opportunity to think long term and influence the future of our communities. This process also invites us to reflect on what we have accomplished—and what we have not. Looking back at past decisions, we may sometimes wonder, "Why did we think that was a good idea?" It is important to remember that we make decisions based on the information, tools, and circumstances available to us at the time. We learn, adapt, and continue striving to make the best decisions we can.

That perspective is especially important as we plan amid growing uncertainty. What impact will artificial intelligence have on how we work? Will electric and self-driving vehicles transform our transportation systems? What emerging technologies will disrupt how our communities operate? How might government systems, priorities, and funding change?

While we cannot predict every change, we can prepare by remaining curious, informed, and connected. APA and APA Minnesota continue to offer resources about emerging trends and opportunities to engage with the experts helping shape our communities.

I encourage you to explore this year's Trends Report and share what is affecting your work. APA and APA Minnesota want to hear about the challenges you are facing, the changes you are seeing, and the ways you are navigating uncertainty in your communities. The future may be uncertain, but comprehensive planning gives us an opportunity to approach it thoughtfully, collaboratively, and with purpose.

**Michael Palermo, AICP**
APA MN President






## APA MN WOMEN IN PLANNING
### CHAPTER UPDATE

In April, the APA MN Women in Planning (WIP) committee hosted a lunch and learn on Salary Negotiations and Career Growth with 18 participants. The event was facilitated by Corrin Wendell, FAICP, the Founder and Executive Director of Youth Engagement Planning (YEP!). After Corrin facilitated a virtual session on this topic as part of WPD-U for national APA, the WIP co-leads thought it would be a great opportunity to offer an in-person session for members of the Minnesota Chapter. The session equipped participants with the knowledge, confidence and strategies to negotiate equitable compensation and advocate for their career growth. Attendees learned practical skills for framing their "ask", handling pushback and identifying opportunities to advance—and had the opportunity to practice these new skills!



Looking ahead, WIP is planning its annual networking walk. This year, we will be hosting the walk in Afton, MN, highlighting public private partnerships, Belwin Conservancy, and their recent work on "Oxbow Trails." We are still finalizing a date, but aiming for sometime in August.

If you have ideas for future events, please reach out to Andrea Rehm at andrea.rehm@washingtoncountymn.gov and Katelyn Champoux at kchampoux@stlouisparkmn.gov.






# SOUTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

By Charles Androsky, APA-MN Southwest District Director

One can't spend much time in the planning world without becoming familiar with the trusty Venn diagram. This framework is useful when considering sustainability and public health; two circles with significant overlap. Goals to improve the natural environment and the health of our communities can often be achieved by implementing coordinated action that benefits both.

Planning in the Southwest District reflects this understanding. Across the district, planners are implementing proven, common-sense interventions that benefit both the environment and their residents' wellbeing.

**North Mankato Expands Transportation Options While Improving Safety**

Kudos to the City of North Mankato (pop. about 14,100), which with assistance from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) recently completed a new Active Transportation Action Plan. The plan engaged the community to identify key steps to make active transportation (a catch-all term for non-motorized travel like walking, biking, and rolling) safer and more comfortable. The plan includes a temporary demonstration project on Haughton Avenue, which places physical barriers on the existing street to slow motor vehicle traffic through residential areas. This effort is intended to both increase safety and make the roadway more amenable for non-motorized users (recall the Venn diagram overlap).

Planners curious about emulating this process should read up on MnDOT's Active Transportation Program, which provides grants and technical assistance to improve conditions for non-motorized users. Cities use the program to develop plans and implement quick-build demonstration projects like the North Mankato example above.



**Southwest District Municipalities Utilize NEVI Resources**

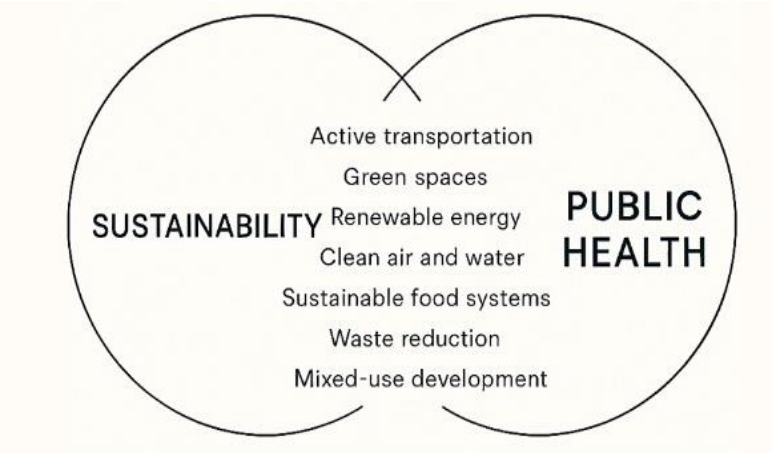
Cities across southern Minnesota are taking advantage of opportunities to increase the availability of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. Such infrastructure creates more options for travelers who wish to reduce their output of tailpipe emissions like heavy metals, particulate matter, and carbon monoxide, among other substances harmful to the environment and human health.

Southern cities like Albert Lea, Austin, Blue Earth, Jackson, St. James, and Worthington have partnerships in varying stages with the private sector and MnDOT to construct new EV charging stations. A successful conduit for partnership has been the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program, a federally funded initiative administered by MnDOT to support the development of EV infrastructure.

Planners in both the Southwest District and across Minnesota should take notice: MnDOT is preparing to release a Request for Proposals for Round 3a of this program, anticipated in late August. Round 3a has about $42 million in federal funds available, with priority sites identified on the EVINA Long Distance Charging Analysis Dashboard.

Planners interested in learning more about the Round 3a opportunity can stay informed about upcoming informational sessions, timelines, and program updates by subscribing to MnDOT's NEVI email list.

# SOUTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE
(continued)




**Sustainability and public health overlap.**

### Minnesota GreenStep Program

Many cities across the Southwest District participate in the Minnesota GreenStep Cities program, a voluntary framework that guides communities through a diverse menu of options to improve environmental and public health outcomes. Statewide, about 150 cities participate in this program, and about 54 percent of Minnesota's population resides in a GreenStep city.

The city of Marshall (pop. about 13,800) has been a GreenStep city since 2012. Marshall has made measurable progress toward advancing sustainability and public health goals, including adding bike trails connecting Marshall to Camden State Park, and implementing a community bikeshare program.

New Ulm (pop. about 14,000) has been a GreenStep city since 2021. The city has made progress within the program by improving environmental management, resilient community development, and land use planning.

Mankato (pop. about 46,000) became a GreenStep city in 2013, completing over 50 documentable, measurable actions to improve sustainability and public health. Mankato has made strides in implementing green building standards, groundwater protection, transit improvements, and sidewalk and trail expansions.

Planners statewide are encouraged to learn more about the GreenStep program and consider joining, or if already a member, to continue to make progress along the program's tiered curriculum.

### Sources

MnDOT, Active Transportation Program

MnDOT, National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, GreenStep Cities



# PLANNING THROUGH THE BLACK MIRROR

By Lance Bernard, APA-MN Metro District Director

Imagine it is the year 2050. Artificial intelligence helps decide how financial aid is distributed to communities. It is designed to make things more efficient, using data like property values and local tax bases to guide decisions. But in this scenario, it ends up doing the opposite of what we want. More resources flow to places that are already doing well, while struggling communities are left behind. Areas that appear financially strong are prioritized because they promise greater economic return, while communities facing real challenges are overlooked because the data does not fully reflect their needs or history.

This futuristic scenario, along with others like it, was explored at a recent event on June 24 at the University of Minnesota. Members of the APA Minnesota Chapter came together to think through future-focused challenges using Planning Through the Black Mirror, a game created by the APA Technology Division. The game invites planners to work through possible future scenarios and consider how technology might shape planning decisions by developing policy frameworks, solutions, and strategies to respond to each challenge.

The session was led by Metro District Directors Stephanie Falkers, Dakota Kastenday, and Lance Bernard. Andrea Trabelsi also gave a presentation on the growing conversations around technology and AI in planning, and how the AICP Code of Ethics can help guide decisions as these tools become more common.

Throughout the evening, planners challenged themselves to think in new ways, working through complex and sometimes uncomfortable future scenarios. Even with all the focus on technology, one clear theme kept coming up. People still need to be at the center of planning. A strong human element and connected community matter. Building relationships, listening to people, and keeping equity front and center remain essential, no matter how much technology evolves.

The conversation made it clear that technology is not neutral. It reflects the choices we make. Without careful thought, it can reinforce existing inequalities. But with intention and a strong focus on community, it can also help create more fair and inclusive outcomes.

**Want to play?**

If you are interested in playing the game, please contact your APA District Director, as the Minnesota Chapter has purchased the game for group play among members.



# SPRING WORKSHOP

By Patrick Boylan, AICP and Leila Bunge, AICP

The Spring Workshop is an annual event hosted by the Minnesota chapter with the stated goal of getting planners out into the field for an "on the ground" experience on various planning topics, typically related to redevelopment sites. Each event has been worth between 3 and 6 AICP credits, and optional networking and refreshments are a steady, recurring anchor of the planned activities. Usually held on the second Friday in May, the recent focus of the spring mobile workshops has been pedestrian and transit experiential learning. We promise great speakers, interesting topics, and opportunities to network with other chapter members from across the public, private, and non-profit worlds.

This year, we partnered with the 2026 Destination Medical Center (DMC) Real Estate Summit on May 28. Participants included 13 Minnesota chapter members, and the day featured a shuttle bus from the Mall of America's north lot to and from the Hyatt in downtown Rochester.

The DMC is the Rochester Economic Development Agency, and the event was organized by the Minnesota Rejournals, part of a multi-state organization that develops training and content for commercial real estate professionals across 16 states. They publish a quarterly MREJ Journal focused on localized markets, host events, and provide research to members.

For this year's spring event, the Chapter co-leads for the Spring Workshop wanted to plan an event outside of the seven-county metro area and partner with an adjacent professional group. The workshop content allowed attendees to obtain 5.5 CM credits.

During the shuttle bus drive to the Hyatt in Rochester, Catherine Malmberg, Director of Public Infrastructure and Strategic Development for the DMC Economic Development Agency, provided a thorough overview of Mayo's plans and the legislation passed in 2013 that established a historic $5.6 billion public-private partnership to solidify Rochester as a global health care hub.

Special thanks to Irene Woodward, AICP and Joshua Johnsen, AICP — both staff with the City of Rochester — who provided chapter members with an immersive downtown redevelopment tour of several sites.

Attendees left the day informed, energized, and inspired by the momentum shaping Rochester and the opportunities ahead. Presentations and tours included innovative housing models, emerging development trends, and infrastructure investments. Morning speakers focused on collaboration among public and private partners — the City of Rochester, Destination Medical Center, Mayo Clinic, University of Minnesota Rochester, and industry leaders — to transform Rochester into a global destination centered on health, innovation, and livability.

For Rochester, the city's central business district is being reshaped. Tour attendees saw a reimagined Peace Plaza, watched construction crews expanding Mayo Clinic's campus, and walked by the new Discovery Square innovation hub.

# SPRING WORKSHOP
(continued)




**Affable Event Organizers:**
Patrick Boylan and Leia Bunge



Rochester staff **Josh Johnsen** (L), Senior Economic Development Specialist and **Irene Woodward** (R), Community Development Director provided MN Chapter attendees with a tour of several redevelopment sites. Pictured above is the pedestrian way and Zumbro River flood control development.

**A true public-private partnership**

A true public-private partnership is driving much of the city's recent growth. The 20-year, $5.6 billion initiative — the largest economic development effort in Minnesota history — passed its halfway mark last year. In 2025, DMC recorded more than $348 million in new private investment, its highest annual total yet, fueled in large part by Mayo Clinic's Bold. Forward. Unbound. expansion.

City staff point to a growing ripple effect beyond Mayo Clinic, citing interest and investment from Minneapolis-area developers like M.A. Mortenson Co. and Ryan Cos. US Inc., biotechnology companies, and the University of Minnesota. Leaders expect even more investment along the Link Bus Rapid Transit line, now under construction and operational in 2027, as well as the upcoming Zumbro River waterfront redevelopment.

Economic development professionals with the DMC believe the long-term structure has given investors confidence: a 20-year time horizon is reliable and predictable, and investors know it is not a one-and-done effort. All work is occurring in tandem with the City of Rochester and Olmsted County.

Key targets include 35,000 net new jobs over 20 years — eleven years in, 17,500 have already been created — more than $5 billion of Mayo construction value, and rising tax revenue.

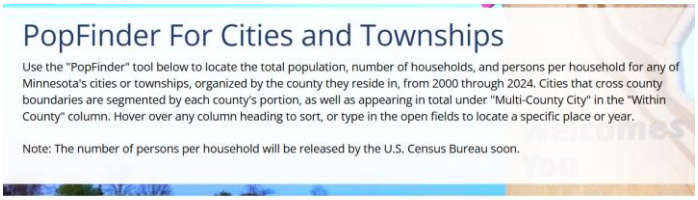
**Discovery Square and what's next**

The partnership is also building a downtown "experience" to address gaps and create world-class facilities for global travelers and visitors, anchored by an improved and expanded Discovery Square & Innovation District along with BioLabs Rochester. Purpose-built for life science startups, BioLabs provides a shared lab incubator that connects startups to flexible lab space, global clinical expertise, and a robust partner network, with space for 25 high-growth bio-innovation companies.

Leila Bunge (Kimley-Horn) and Patrick Boylan (Metropolitan Council) are already planning an outdoor summer event and the 2027 Spring Workshop — stay tuned to APA MN's site.

Share in the enduring environmental, social and economic benefits of Minnesota's historical and cultural heritage.

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
mn.gov/admin/shpo



PopFinder For Cities and Townships

Use the "PopFinder" tool below to locate the total population, number of households, and persons per household for any of Minnesota's cities or townships, organized by the county they reside in, from 2000 through 2024. Cities that cross county boundaries are segmented by each county's portion, as well as appearing in total under "Multi-County City" in the "Within County" column. Hover over any column heading to sort, or type in the open fields to locate a specific place or year.

Note: The number of persons per household will be released by the U.S. Census Bureau soon.

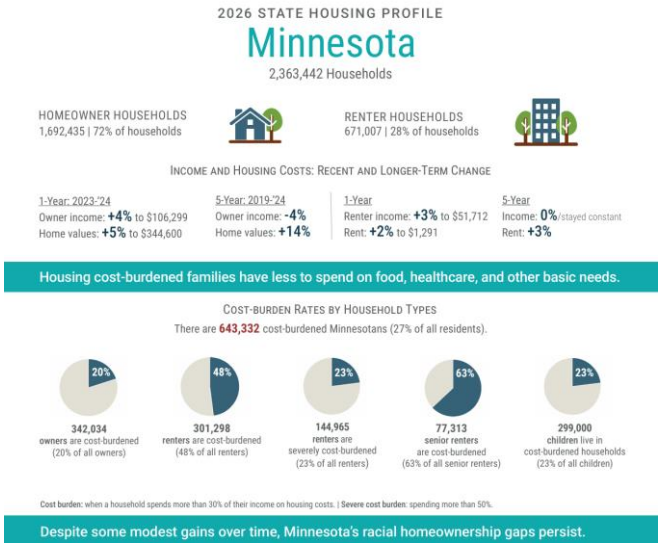
| Within County | Geography | Year | Population | Households | PPH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CountyWithin | CityorTownship | Year | TotalPopulation | Households | PersonsPerH |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2000 | 452 | 176 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2001 | 449 | 176 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2002 | 454 | 179 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2003 | 467 | 185 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2004 | 483 | 192 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2005 | 487 | 195 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2006 | 489 | 197 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2007 | 478 | 194 | |
| Aitkin | Aitkin Co. Unorganized | 2008 | 480 | 195 | |

## MINNESOTA POPULATION ESTIMATES

Minnesota reached 5,891,109 residents and 2,375,248 households in 2025, a growth of 3.2 percent since the 2020 census, according to estimates released by the State Demographic Center in July 2026. The data breaks down to the city and township level: Wright (11.5%), Carver (10.4%), and Washington (8.9%) counties grew fastest, while 32 counties lost population. Essential baseline numbers as communities open their comprehensive plan updates.

The estimates can be found here:

2025 Population and Household Estimates



2026 STATE HOUSING PROFILE

Minnesota

2,363,442 Households

HOMEOWNER HOUSEHOLDS
1,692,435 | 72% of households

RENTER HOUSEHOLDS
671,007 | 28% of households

INCOME AND HOUSING COSTS: RECENT AND LONGER-TERM CHANGE

1-Year: 2023-'24
Owner income: +4% to $106,299
Home values: +5% to $344,600

5-Year: 2019-'24
Owner income: -4%
Home values: +14%

1-Year
Renter income: +3% to $51,712
Rent: +2% to $1,291

5-Year
Income: 0%/stayed constant
Rent: +3%

Housing cost-burdened families have less to spend on food, healthcare, and other basic needs.

COST-BURDEN RATES BY HOUSEHOLD TYPES

There are 643,332 cost-burdened Minnesotans (27% of all residents).

20% — 342,034 owners are cost-burdened (20% of all owners)

48% — 301,298 renters are cost-burdened (48% of all renters)

23% — 144,965 renters are severely cost-burdened (23% of all renters)

63% — 77,313 senior renters are cost-burdened (63% of all senior renters)

23% — 299,000 children live in cost-burdened households (23% of all children)

Cost burden: when a household spends more than 30% of their income on housing costs. | Severe cost burden: spending more than 50%.

Despite some modest gains over time, Minnesota's racial homeownership gaps persist.

## 2026 STATE HOUSING PROFILE

Nearly half of Minnesota renter households are cost burdened, rising to 63 percent of senior renters, and the state is short more than 101,000 homes that are affordable and available to extremely low-income renters. The median age of a first-time homebuyer has climbed to a historic high of 40. Minnesota now ranks 45th nationally for the homeownership gap between white households and households of color.

The profile can be found here:

2026 Minnesota State Housing Profile



Climate Planning & Consultation

Energy Planning

Electric Vehicle Readiness

GREAT PLAINS INSTITUTE

Achieve Your Climate & Energy Goals

Brian Ross, AICP, LEED
bross@gpisd.net
612-767-7296

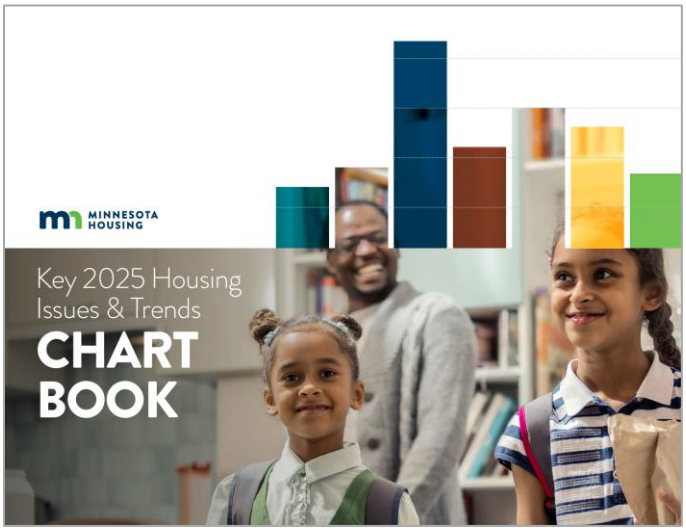
Learn more at:
BetterEnergy.org/Your-services



wsb

More is possible when we work together.

Community solutions for the spaces, places and systems that support our lives.

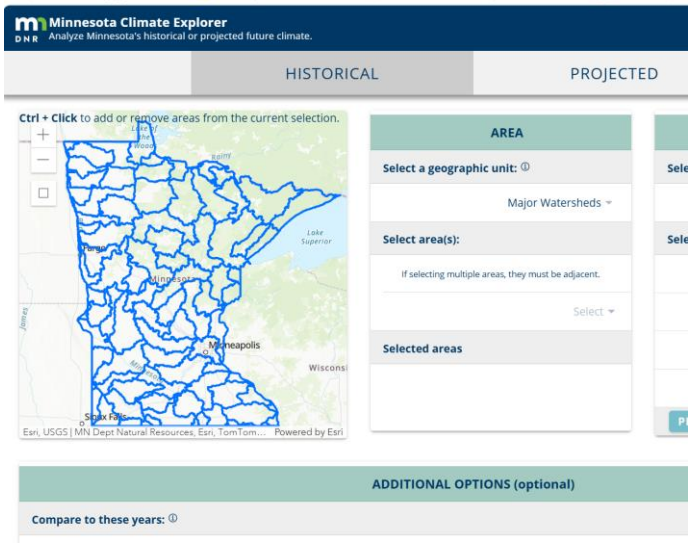



## HOUSING TRENDS CHART BOOK

Minnesota Housing's chart book documents the key housing issues and trends shaping the state, organized so readers can skim the sidebar headlines or dig into the notes behind each chart. It covers production, cost burden, homeownership rates, rents, and the gap between wages and housing costs. A useful, citable reference when a council or planning commission asks where the local housing numbers come from.

The chart book can be found here:

Key Housing Issues & Trends Chart Book




## MINNESOTA CLIMATE EXPLORER

The DNR's Climate Explorer charts historical and projected climate data for any Minnesota county, watershed, or region, with observed records reaching back to 1895. Pick a variable, a time scale, and a comparison period to see local trends in temperature and precipitation, with smoothing and trend lines built in. A fast way to ground a resilience chapter in local numbers rather than statewide generalities.

The tool can be found here:

Minnesota Climate Explorer | Minnesota DNR






Job openings and requests for proposals are available on the APA MN website:

https://minnesota.planning.org/jobs/posts/

https://minnesota.planning.org/career-center/rfp-rfq/

Recent job postings include:

- Project Selection Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Community Development Director, City of Elko New Market
- State Program 5310 Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Senior Planner - Housing Policy, Metropolitan Council
- Extension Educator, Leadership & Community Engagement, University of Minnesota Extension
- Planning and Development Director, Arrowhead Regional Development Commission

Recent requests for proposals include:

- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update, City of Golden Valley
- Single-Family Housing Development (HOPE), City of Golden Valley
- Inclusionary Housing Economic Calibration Study and Affordable Housing Policy Update, City of Edina
- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update, City of Waconia
- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Public Engagement Services, City of Hopkins
- Subarea Planning and Stormwater Engineering, City of Appleton, WI







