

PLANNING MINNESOTA



American Planning Association
Minnesota Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

A Publication of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association

Fall-Winter 2025



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Volume 44, Number 2

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Published by: 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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CHAPTER UPDATES

PRESIDENT'S DESK

We Need Third Places

APA Minnesota's mission is "To create great communities for *all*." This has become increasingly difficult if not impossible in Minnesota with the onset of "Operation Metro Surge." The harsh and violent nature of Federal government agents interacting with our communities is sowing distrust amongst government, deteriorating our local economies, and destroying the ongoing work of our members.

A core principle in urban and regional planning is that our systems, our built environment, and our plans address the needs of all our community members. Without that foundation, we are setting up our communities up to fail. We risk exacerbating poverty, disenfranchising large populations, and polluting our environment. The greater good is achieved when many and diverse voices are at the table and empowered to participate.

APA Minnesota encourages its members to continue to do the good work to engage with communities and reestablish trust. This process is difficult, will require a concerted effort, and may take years. How we conduct community engagement is ever important and is fundamentally changed due the actions of the Federal government. Local and State Planning will have to work harder than ever to reach our communities and ensure their voice matters.

In the short term, many communities are taking the steps they can to help provide economic resources to our struggling business community and those unable to work due to fear.

This links below are just a few lists of resources links that are available to support communities and provide examples of support that can be offered.

- <https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov/pd/city-response-federal-immigration-enforcement>
- <https://www.richfieldmn.gov/residents/immigration/index.php>
- <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/city-federal-response/>
- <https://www.robbinsdalemn.gov/378/Immigration-Resources>
- <https://welovetc.com/>
- <https://www.elevatehennepin.org/events-news/announcements/Small-business-relief-funds>

While resources such as these may help in the short term, the work to reestablish connection with our communities will be long term. APA Minnesota will continue to provide educational trainings, peer connection, and other resources to encourage creative ways for public engagement. It is increasingly important for Planners to stay up to date and knowledgeable of trends and available resources.

APA National has just released its annual trends report: <https://planning.org/publications/document/9323378/>. This report outlines not only identified trends in our industry but also connects to a multitude of resources to ensure we are serving our communities.

Please continue to take care of yourself and your communities. APA Minnesota acknowledges that our members are impacted in varying ways, some more directly than others. Please reach out and connect with APA Minnesota when you need assistance or want to share with your peers. Resources continue to be available on our website as well as our leadership's contact information.



CHAPTER UPDATES

VICE PRESIDENT'S DESK

We Need Third Places

In the last few years, but especially in the last couple of months, I've been thinking about just how great third places are. I love third places. I have a soapbox firmly labeled 'third places' that I'm always excited to haul out and sing their praises. They have a strong history as spaces of community, connection, grieving, celebration, healing, and collective action. For me, third places have been a balm to the violence and trauma of recent actions by the federal government, where mutual aid, support, action, and connection have thrived. Social connection is critical to our mental and physical health. Both the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have declared social isolation an epidemic, citing studies that show increased risk for things like anxiety, depression, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions that impact mortality and quality of life. There are many ways to deepen relationships between people, and as planners, we can turn to our built environment to create more space for connection.



Ideally, third places have a low- or no- cost of entry, like parks, community rec centers, public plazas, meeting halls, and libraries, but coffee shops, cafes, breweries, gyms, and other places with some cost to entry are also important spaces outside the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). Ensuring a balance of places with various costs of entry is important so they remain accessible to people with a variety of needs. In planning, this can show up in our workplaces as advocating for land use and zoning policies that enable the creation and perpetuity of third places. In community, it's continuing to discover and visit your third places and connect with others as much as you're able.

Take care of yourselves, each other, and the places where we meet,

Michelle Lincoln

Vice President, APA MN

APA MN WOMEN IN PLANNING CHAPTER UPDATE

In December, the APA MN Women in Planning (WIP) committee hosted a lunch and learn about expanding the career horizon for planners and illustrating the diverse ways planning skills can be applied across different sectors and roles. The panel discussion featured three accomplished women - Raya Esmaeili, Andrea Rand, and Gretchen Beuchler - who have taken alternative routes in their planning careers. Some of the key takeaways from the event include:

- Network, network, network. A person’s network may surprise you. Continue to network inside and outside of your current role/sector because you never know who may have the connection that helps you take that next step.
- If you don’t see the role you want, you may be able to create it. Advocate for yourself, your skills and the value you could bring to a workplace.
- Priorities shift and there will be many versions of yourself as a professional throughout your career. Embrace the possibility of change and know that it is a normal part of one’s career.

It was great to see planners at all career stages turn out for this event. The WIP co-chairs look forward to hosting more events like this in 2026! 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.



PLANNING FOR DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: WHY CULTURE, DATA, AND COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT MATTER

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION CHAPTER UPDATE

By Denetrick Powers, Co-chair DEI Committee

The United States is becoming more diverse, but for planners, the more important point is that our communities are becoming more culturally complex. That change is showing up in age structure, migration



patterns, language use, household composition, and economic opportunity. In Minnesota, the [State Demographic Center's 2026 chartbook](#) makes a strong case for why broad racial categories are no longer enough for planning analysis: they can hide major differences among communities with distinct migration histories, cultural networks, and lived experiences.

That matters because Minnesota's future workforce will look different from its past. The report finds that 35 percent of Minnesota children belong to BIPOC cultural groups, compared with 22 percent of working-age adults and only 8 percent of older adults. It also shows that half of Minnesota's Somali population is under age 21, while Ethiopian, Puerto Rican, and Mexican Minnesotans have median ages around 25. About 524,000 Minnesotans, roughly 9 percent, are foreign-born.

The [state's migration report](#) adds another layer to this picture. In 2023 migration accounted for 42 percent of Minnesota's population growth, and the Demographic Center projects that by the late 2040's any population growth Minnesota experiences will come from migration rather than a natural increase. At the same time, Minnesota has had a

long-term pattern of modest domestic out-migration, especially among young adults, even though international migration has become increasingly important to sustaining growth and labor force capacity.

Texas provides a useful comparison because many of the same trends appear there at a larger scale. U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts estimates show Texas with about 31.3 million residents in 2024, compared to 5.79 million in Minnesota. Texas is 40.3 percent Hispanic or Latino, 17.6 percent foreign-born, and 35.1 percent speaks a language other than English at home; Minnesota is 6.7 percent Hispanic or Latino, 8.7 percent foreign-born, and 12.4 percent speaks a language other than English at home. Texas is also younger overall, with 24.5 percent of residents under age 18 compared to 22.4 percent in Minnesota.

For planners, the takeaway is not simply that diversity is increasing. It is that demographic change reshapes culture over time. As immigrant and foreign-born communities grow so do multilingual households, transnational identities, new community institutions, and evolving expectations about public life and belonging. [Stuart Hall](#) wrote that cultural identity is always in process, formed through history as much as heritage. [Amilcar Cabral](#) likewise treated culture as a living force shaped through struggle, continuity, and change. In planning terms, demographic data rare never numerical shifts. They are signals of how communities interpret place, power, memory, and participation.

This spring, the APA Minnesota Chapter DEI subcommittee will host a virtual education event in collaboration with the Texas APA People and Culture committee. Together, we will explore cultural demographic data and trends, compare what Minnesota and Texas can teach us, and discuss implications for planning policy, public engagement and

PLANNING FOR DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

CHAPTER UPDATE (continued)

APA MN LEGISLATIVE & LAW CHAPTER UPDATE

community assessment.

We will also focus on how to conduct community assessments that lead to equitable and inclusive outcomes. Good assessments do more than summarize top-line statistics. They ask who is growing, who is newly arrived, who may be missed by conventional engagement, and which community assets and trusted networks already exist. For planning practitioners, that is where demographic insight becomes better process and better policy.

Stay tuned for more details!

The Minnesota Legislature session began on February 17th. APA-MN and the Legislative and Law Committee have been engaged with lawmakers and have provided technical assistance regarding [HF3895](#). The bill is a consolidation of the range of land use bills from last session and is intended by lawmakers to increase the supply of housing in Minnesota.

HF3895 had an informational hearing in the Minnesota House of Representatives' Housing Finance and Policy Committee on March 3, 2026 and is expected to continue. The informational hearing can be viewed [here](#). APA-MN's Legislative and Law Committee will continue to monitor legislation relevant to planning practice in Minnesota and will continue to update members.

The banner features the logos for APA MN and APA TX on either side, with an ampersand (&) in the center. Below the logos, the text reads "KEEPING UP WITH PEOPLE AND CULTURE". At the bottom, it provides the date and time of the session: "Wednesday, May 13, 12:00 - 1:30 pm CT, CM | 1.5 pending". A "REGISTER NOW" button with a megaphone icon is also present.

APA MN
DEI COMMITTEE

APA TX
PEOPLE & CULTURE COMMITTEE

KEEPING UP WITH PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Join APA MN's DEI Committee and APA TX's People & Culture Committee for a virtual session on May 13th, 12-1:30 pm CT. This collaborative discussion will explore how shifting population trends in Minnesota and Texas are shaping planning practice, public engagement, and strategies for equitable, inclusive community outcomes.

Wednesday, May 13
12:00 - 1:30 pm CT
CM | 1.5 pending

REGISTER NOW

APA MN STUDENTS CHAPTER UPDATE

Brenna McConnell Jansen and Natalia Uro-DeLeon serve as the 2025-2026 Student Representatives for the APA-MN chapter. As graduate students from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in Cedar Riverside, their past year has been a tumultuous, yet activating one.



Following a difficult November 2025, many students reinvigorated their focus towards the local community to show solidarity and fortify their capacity to serve. Among these student-led efforts, Humphrey students worked closely with the Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association (RPTA), a pillar non-profit dedicated to supporting community members through educational and professional opportunities. Thanks to generous funding awarded through the George Floyd Human Rights Internship Fund, Humphrey students supported RPTA's com-

munity development efforts. Over summer break, Rahmo Said, Cristian Tineo, and Natalia Uro-De León, worked closely with RPTA to assist existing programming and lead youth-engaged planning workshops.

On July 18, 2025, the graduate students welcomed Kelly Rogers, a PhD student from the University of Minnesota History Department and a [Mapping Prejudice](#) researcher to a special youth workshop. Kelly led young residents through the rich history of Ce-



APA MN STUDENTS CHAPTER UPDATE (continued)

dar Riverside, providing key context for the walking tour of Cedar Riverside. Using on-the-ground observations, our future planners got to work, reimagining transit stops and the Dania Hall lot with their creative vision!



Equipped with sketch pads, sticky notes, and coloring supplies, our young planners brought their design ideas to life! The energy in the classroom was palpable, as our students pitched their amenities to the class and discussed the future of the Dania Hall lot. By the end of our session, we had created a vibrant mixed-media collage of our newly imagined site. Our final proposal included solar panel-shaded benches, a pollinator garden, an ice cream shop and cafe, and even advocated for housing options! These bright young minds expertly incorporated mixed-use and green infrastructure into their pro-

posal, which inspired the Humphrey student team to explore future opportunities for youth-engaged planning.

Fast forward to December: When unprecedented amounts of fear and uncertainty directly impacted the Cedar Riverside community, the APA-MN Humphrey team was quick to respond. In addition to supporting mutual aid and community patrolling efforts, the Humphrey team fostered safe spaces for creativity and comfort.

Alongside our RPTA partners, Brenna and Natalia coordinated with [Corrin Hoegen Wendell](#) (Founder and Executive Director of Youth Engagement Planning (YEP!)), Sylvie Guezeon ([APA-MN Student Director](#)), and Nichola Lowe (APA-MN faculty representative) to plan a Cocoa & Community event for the young families of Cedar Riverside.

On December 21st, 2025, young Somali families came together for a late afternoon filled with creativity and conversation. After reading Ava Tanner the City Planner, our students shared their astute observations about their community, making note of assets and opportunities for growth.

With these fresh insights in mind, these emerging planners imagined the future of Cedar Riverside which included apartment buildings, lush parks, and an indoor playground. Fueled with cookies and hot cocoa, the students created a bustling atmosphere and eagerly presented their ideas to their peers.

APA MN STUDENTS CHAPTER UPDATE (continued)

The 2025-2026 student programming fostered community and resilience, strengthening the Cedar-Humphrey relationship through creativity and joy. As student representatives, Brenna and Natalia are incredibly grateful for the support APA-MN provided them to reconnect with the local community through the lens of youth-engaged planning.

As they wrap up their time with the APA-MN chapter, they celebrate a successful year of community engagement and student activation and look forward to the next cohort of student leaders!



APA MN AWARDS 2025 RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to all our 2025 APA MN Planning Award recipients!

Advancing Diversity & Social Change Award

City of Bloomington

Alejandra Pelinka, Director of Creative Placemaking

Bloomington Citywide Creative Placemaking Award

Comprehensive Plan or Small Area Plan Award

City of Winona

HKGi

2045 Comprehensive Plan

Planning Excellence Award

Metro Transit, Ramsey and Washington Counties, Kimley-Horn, and HNTB

METRO Gold Line Planning and Implementation

Outstanding Student Award

Morgan Bliss, Theodore Jessup, Christine Hokkala-Kuhns, and Andrew Peterson

Building Community Resourcefulness Through Engagement in Morton, MN

President's Award

Sam McKinney

Peg and Otto Schmidt Planner of the Year Award

Emily Goellner

Lifetime Achievement Award

Cindy Gray

FAICP INDUCTION

CORRIN WENDELL



Corrin Wendell will be inducted to the American Institute of Certified Planners College of Fellows for outstanding achievements in Urban Planning on April 26, 2026, at the National Planning Conference in Detroit, Michigan. Induction to the AICP College of Fellows is the highest honor the American Institute of Certified Planners bestows upon a member.

Nominated by the APA Women in Planning Division, Corrin is one of fifty-five planners comprising the Class of 2026 College of Fellows and is the ninth planner from Minnesota to receive this distinction.

Corrin's Story

What started as a graduate project ended up as a life-long passion and the eventual founding of a non-profit that has transformed community planning across the nation and abroad. Corrin Wendell's objective in 2006, as part of her graduate studies at The Ohio State University, was to teach urban planning in K-12 schools as part of a "Planners Day in School" project. Corrin carried on the work after graduating realizing that no one was going into K-12 schools to teach planning, and youth were "missing" in community planning processes. She founded the nonprofit, "YEP! Youth Engagement in Planning", to provide free tools and resources for volunteers to introduce planning in K-12 schools and for planners to include youth voices in decision making processes for their communities. "That is the light that ignites us in the work that we do", said Corrin in an interview for this article.

Today, "YEP! – Youth Engagement Planning", provides a national infrastructure for civic education that empowers students to co-create their communities. "YEP!" has engaged over 10,000 youth, trained thousands of planners, and inspired new models of civic engagement and policy. Over the last two decades, Corrin has built YEP! into an internationally recognized and award-winning non-profit powerhouse that educates and empowers K-12 youth through urban planning education, civic engagement, and advocacy for equitable, community-driven change. With the help of a nine-member, female-forward Board of Directors and army of volunteers, Corrin has introduced YEP!'s curriculum and resources in 85+ countries, paying special attention to youth representing neurodivergent, unhoused, LGBTQ+, food-insecure, low-income, and underserved communities. Corrin's tireless advocacy has also generated over \$100,000 in donations, sponsorships, and in-kind support used to deliver free programming, educational materials, meals, and supplies to youth and educators, across the country and the world.

FAICP INDUCTION

CORRIN WENDELL (continued)

The central philosophy to Corrin’s work is her unwavering belief that planning should serve everyone, especially those who have historically been excluded. She has led transformative efforts to embed equity, inclusion, and youth voice into the fabric of planning. She didn’t wait for a seat at the table—she went ahead and built new ones, which in turn has directly influenced how planning is practiced, who it includes, and who it serves.

In addition to her work with YEP!, Corrin has “a heart for small communities” and has worked in four small communities in Minnesota. She also worked for the Metropolitan Council, and recently established her own consulting firm, “Future Focus Strategies”, in 2024.

Her outstanding career achievements include:

- Leading the first fully illustrated zoning code rewrite in North St. Paul, Minnesota in over 40 years, aligning regulations with community goals and catalyzing downtown revitalization, affordable housing development, age-friendly community design, and increased walkability in a historically underserved small city.
- Pioneering a youth-driven engagement model for the Pioneer Park Master Plan in Little Canada, engaging 600+ elementary students, of which 80% of their ideas were adopted—setting a national precedent for meaningful youth participation in public planning.
- Creating APA’s award-winning “Girls Who Plan” initiative and developed the Girl Scouts City Planning Patch, reaching thousands of girls nationwide and inspiring early civic leadership, career exploration, and planning awareness among youth from underrepresented communities. Over 325 Girl Scouts have earned this revolutionary patch, to date.

- Authored “Ava Tanner the City Planner”, the first children’s book to introduce urban planning to young readers—especially girls and children of color—reaching 3,000+ readers in 85 countries and expanding early access to civic education worldwide.

Corrin continues to be an active member of the APA Women in Planning Division, holding many committee positions over the years, and has served on several state and national APA and AICP Committees. She is a prolific speaker delivering presentations at 81 international, national, and regional/state industry conferences, 19 of which at the National Planning Conference and 10 Keynote presentations. She also serves as an expert advisor for APA’s Upskilling Initiative.

Finally, Corrin’s efforts have been honored with 16 national and international awards—but more importantly, her efforts have reshaped planning systems to be more just, representative, and future-focused.

Planning for the FAICP Class of 2028

Planning for the next cycle of applications for the Class of 2028 will begin this fall. The application deadline has not been announced as of yet but is anticipated to occur in July 2027. Eligible applicants must have at least 10 years of AICP membership. To nominate someone (or yourself), complete the Expression of Interest form on the Minnesota Chapter FAICP Nomination page or contact a member of the FAICP Committee. The purpose of the FAICP Committee is to recommend Minnesota planners for nomination to FAICP membership and to assist with the application process. Corrin will join current members Julie Klemp-Wischnack, Barbara Dacy, and Peter Hendee Brown in helping future candidates for FAICP.

BRIDGING THE GAP

APA MN & HUMPHREY SCHOOL WORKSHOP SERIES

What happens when you put seasoned urban planning practitioners and master's students in the same room to learn together? You get a powerhouse of networking, mentorship and cutting-edge skill-building.



To support this type of exchange, the APA-MN chapter and the UMN Humphrey School's Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program initiated a new collaboration in 2023 to create co-enrolled workshop courses that would be open to MURP students and local planners. Former APA MN President Laila Imihy proposed this innovative partnership. The goal is simple but ambitious—create a formal space where students and professionals can learn side-by-side.

Our inaugural workshop, "AI and the City" taught by Dr. Katie OConnell set the stage. It also functioned as a pilot to allow the Humphrey School academic team, led by Assistant Dean Diana Beck and supported by Humphrey Registrar Karri Bitner, to refine processes for practitioner enrollment, while navigating the nuances of AICP Certification Maintenance (CM) credits. Building on that momentum, we recently hosted our second workshop focused on Comprehensive Plan Development and Writing. Led by Humphrey Alumna and Bolton & Menk Community Planning Project Manager, Robin Caufman, this two-day Saturday event saw incredible engagement: Nearly 40 Humphrey students enrolled; 12 Minnesota practitioners participated; and even more students and practitioners were on the long waitlist. After learning the fundamentals, students and practitioners paired up in small teams to help nine Minnesota communities get a jump start on their own comp plan development. Workshop participants also heard tips and lessons learned

from several expert panelists, including Laila Imihy (Deputy City Manager for the City of Mound) and Christopher Corbett (City of Willmar Director of Planning and Development).

This ongoing institutional partnership is designed as a win-win for our Minnesota planning community. For practitioners, it is a chance to refresh technical skill sets and stay current on evolving trends. For students, it provides a much-desired networking opportunity, allowing them to connect with potential employers and mentors at the exact moment they are seeking summer internships or applying for post-graduation jobs. MURP student and APA MN Student Representative Brenna McConnell Jansen participated in the Comprehensive Plan Development and Writing class. She said, "By bringing students and practitioners into the same room together, these workshops provide interesting opportunities to connect classroom topics to tangible outcomes and ground our coursework in the Minnesota-specific planning context."

Looking Ahead

To accommodate the busy schedules of full-time practicing planners, these workshops are typically held in person on Saturdays as single all-day sessions or as a two-part series.

We want to hear from you! As we plan our future curriculum, we are seeking recommendations for topics and formats that would serve master's students and the professional community.

Have a topic idea? Please reach out to Nichola Lowe (nlowe@umn.edu), Director of the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program at the Humphrey School and Faculty Liaison for the APA MN Chapter.

APA MN SUMMER BIKE TOUR

MOBILE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The APA-MN Spring Workshop has been held since 2012 and this year we also hosted a second mobile bike tour in the afternoon on August 8, 2025 that was focused on a public art tour of the Mississippi Central Riverfront and NE Minneapolis areas.

Leila Bunge (Kimley-Horn) and **Patrick Boylan** (Metropolitan Council) organized the mobile bike tour that garnered ~16 bikers plus a speaker.

Planners gathered at Pryes Brewing Company in Minneapolis where Leila and Patrick welcomed everyone and gave a brief overview of the tour activities planned and information on other upcoming APA activities. The tour included several stops to learn more about the history and implementation techniques of the public art installations that covered a little over 10 miles. **The tour was led by Greg Ingraham, a retired landscape architect/planner and public artist.** Special thanks to Lance Bernard (TC2) who serves as the “bike mechanic” to help an attendee with a flat tire!

The optional after-event took place at Pryes Brewing Company where participants enjoyed appetizers and beverages afterwards and networked together after the event.

Stay tuned for future mobile workshop events that Leila and Patrick are planning next year in 2026 and reach out if you have ideas for future mobile tours!

Contact us at:

Leila: Leila.Bunge@kimley-horn.com

Patrick: Patrick.Boylan@metc.state.mn.us



APA MN SUMMER BIKE TOUR EVENT PHOTOS



APA MN WINTER SKI TOUR

MOBILE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The APA-MN Spring Workshop has been held since 2012 and this past month we hosted our first **winter ski mobile tour** in the afternoon of February 24, 2026 at Battle Creek Recreation Center in St. Paul that was focused on regional park planning and implementation.

Patrick Boylan (Metropolitan Council) and Leila Bunge (Kimley-Horn) organized the ski event that garnered ~13 skiers plus several speakers including **Brett “Gus” Blumer**, Director of Planning & Development for the Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Department and **Kristopher Lencowski**, Director of Operations for Parks & Trails Division, as well as **Thony Thao, Colin Kelly, and Patrick Boylan** with the Metropolitan Council.

Ramsey County Park Planning and Operations staff led the tour and provided a fantastic learning opportunity of the history of the site, the natural resource considerations, and the annual operations of a popular wintertime trails for snow shoeing, hiking, and Nordic cross country skiing at Battle Creek Regional Park.

Planners were able to get outside and enjoy some cross country skiing after the tour to continue the discussion and immerse attendees in the content further. The optional after-event took place at Saint Paul Brewing Company where participants enjoyed appetizers and beverages afterwards and networked together after the event.

Stay tuned for future mobile workshop events that Leila and Patrick are planning for this spring and reach out if you have ideas for future mobile tours!

Contact us at:

Leila: Leila.Bunge@kimley-horn.com



APA MN WOMEN IN PLANNING CONFERENCE RECAP

Thank you to everyone who joined our session, **How to “do good” and be paid what you’re worth**, at the APA MN Conference. Thanks also to our panelists—Beth Elliot, Amber Turnquest, and Chloe McGuire—for sparking great conversations around disparities in negotiations and giving women in planning tools to use moving forward. The following sections summarize the key takeaways from the event.

Ask for what you want and know that you deserve it.

While many folks have trouble quantifying the value of qualitative skills, know that you bring value to your organization. Securing grant money, growing tax revenue by shepherding development, building community trust, etc., are all contributions you bring that make an agency or organization run.

Bigger picture, push yourself and the industry to “shift the analysis” of fair pay—compare planners not to just other planners but other industry professionals such as engineers and landscape architects.

Recognize and challenge the systems that perpetuate pay inequity.

The panel discussed examples of how they’ve seen systems disadvantage women in the planning field. One example was application screening questionnaires common in public sector job applications – for job applicants with similar levels of experience, women tend to answer screening questions modestly while men are more likely to claim expertise in all areas.

As a job seeker, promote yourself confidently, knowing you can talk through the nuance of your skills in a future interview. As a hiring manager, recognize and challenge biases in the hiring process by asking human resources to share all the applications so qualified women are not unfairly filtered out.

Keep the conversation going.

A session participant reflected that this isn’t the first time a salary negotiation panel has been held at APA MN, but that the conversation keeps progressing.

Keep talking about compensation to create a culture of transparency. Learn from your peers and mentors' experiences. In positions of power, advocate for women behind the scenes and push your organization.

Future Opportunity

Want to dig in deeper? APA Women and Planning Division launched WPD-University, a four-course professional development series. Learn more and register at <https://women.planning.org/knowledge-center/wpd-university/>

DISTRICT NEWS

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

By Charles Androsky, APA-MN Southwest District Director

Planners in the southwest region continue to address a range of opportunities and challenges. The region's diverse cohort of public and private planning staff look forward to hosting their statewide peers at the 2026 APA-MN Statewide Conference in Mankato this October 21 - 23. Many visitors attending the statewide conference are likely to arrive by traveling on U.S. Highway 169, which connects the region to the metro area and beyond.

This important state highway provides a gateway to the region and is sometimes described as the "front door" to the Mankato/North Mankato community. This corridor is set to [undergo significant change](#), largely due to the coordination of planning staff for several local and state agencies. As reports the Mankato Free Press, "Community leaders have been concerned for years that the Highway 169 corridor on the north side of Mankato-North Mankato — the primary entrance to the area from the Twin Cities — leaves visitors with a poor first impression. After being treated to the scenic Minnesota River valley from Le Sueur to the northern edge of Mankato, drivers experience an abrupt switch in the landscape to pavement, signal lights, a sprawling vacant manufacturing plant, a demolition materials site, trucking firms, fast food restaurants and motels."

Planners for local cities including Mankato, North Mankato, South Bend, and Skyline collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on plans for a corridor reconstruction which prioritized the needs of all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. [The study they developed](#) will inform about \$80 million dollars in investment along a critical four mile stretch of Highway 169. Construction is set to begin next year. Local staff and stakeholders formed a Visual Quality Advisory Committee to help guide investments in the corridor's aesthetic and placemaking elements. These new visual elements, along with converting several signalized intersections to roundabouts, will produce a safer, more pedestrian-friendly, visually pleasant gateway

to local communities.

From the Mankato Free Press, "A \$1.2 million visual makeover of Highway 169 next year, approved by MnDOT and the cities of Mankato and North Mankato, will be primarily focused on the segment between the new roundabouts that will be constructed at Webster Avenue, right, and River Drive (which will replace the Lind Street intersection)."

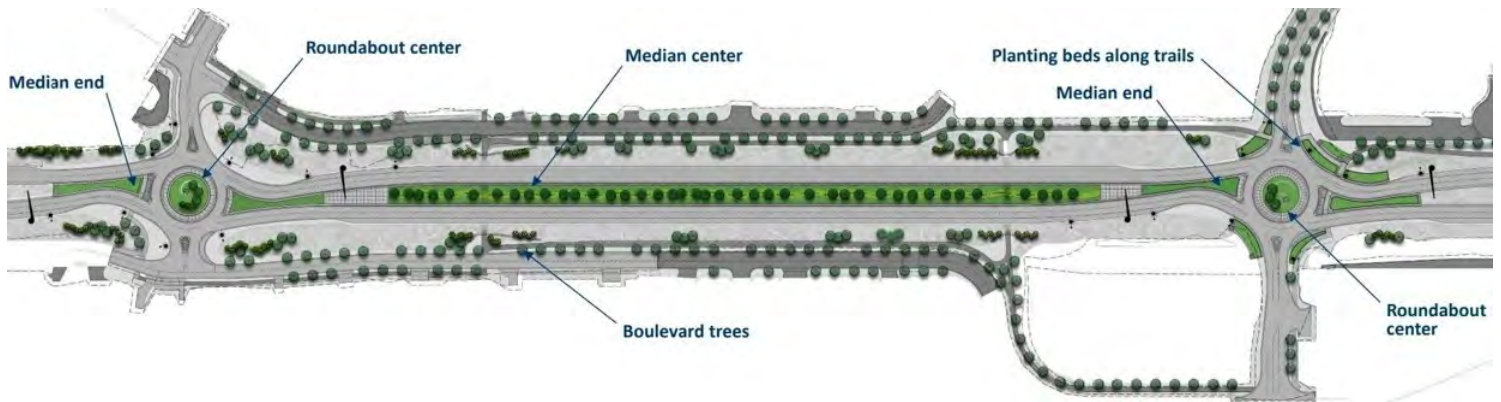
Data Centers

The rapid advancement of machine learning, chatbots and large language models, commonly grouped under the umbrella term "Artificial Intelligence (AI)" has led to a significant increase in demand for large-scale data centers. As [reported by APA](#), "Behind every chatbot interaction, predictive algorithm, or autonomous system lies a vast network of data centers, power generators, and electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure."

Planners across the state have found themselves acting as intermediaries between large software and real estate firms interested in constructing sprawling data centers, and a skeptical public wary of the [negative externalities](#) that often accompany these data centers. Local communities have found that the benefits of such data centers, often in the form of short-term construction jobs and activation of vacant industrial park land, is often eclipsed by the disadvantages these developments can bring in the form of water usage, rising utility bills, noise, and environmental harms.

In the southwest district of the state, the City of North Mankato (population 14,000) was recently approached by a national real estate firm called Oppidan. The firm was interested in constructing one such data center. However, the firm backed out after initial investigation, reportedly due to challenges in gaining permits for backup generators, which the firm was concerned would take too long to obtain. According to North Mankato's community development director, Michael Fischer, the company is "no longer interested" in the city

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE (continued)



Highway 169 Redesign

and withdrew its proposal a few months earlier, before actually making an official application. City staff stated that the city would not be interested in a hyperscale data center, but that "data centers come in all shapes and sizes. They're not all hyperscale."

Addressing Homelessness

Like many planners statewide, local planning staff are taking steps to address the related issues of homelessness and a statewide shortage of affordable housing stock. Among local efforts, at the end of last year the City of Mankato secured a \$115,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The city will use these funds to remediate contaminated soil for the development of a 40-unit apartment complex to address homelessness. The site is located at 750 Linder Avenue in Mankato. When completed, this project will demonstrate a successful collaboration between local and state actors.

Sources

Mankato Free Press, [\\$1.2M Hwy 169 beautification set for next year](#)

Data Center Dynamics, [Oppidan backs out of data center development in North Mankato, Minnesota](#)

Mankato Free Press, ["Pivotal" funding secured for Mankato housing project addressing homelessness](#)

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mn.gov/admin/shpo

DISTRICT NEWS

METRO DISTRICT UPDATE

Meet Your Metro District Directors

Stephanie Falkers, AICP and Lance Bernard are excited to represent the Metro District as they collaborate with Dakota Kastenday and the APA MN Board to continue strengthening and expanding educational programs and events.

APA MN has a special place in our hearts because we've met so many wonderful friends within this nerdy planning community. When we join forces, we make great things happen for our organization and create programs and events that people get excited about.

With that spirit in mind, we are inviting volunteers to partner with any of the APA MN District Directors to help shape meaningful programs for 2026 and beyond. If you are ready to add your energy and ideas to the mix, we would love to have you jump in. We are currently cooking up some programs focused on AI and the new land use challenges we face in this ever-evolving world of technology.

[Reach out to any of the Metro District Directors or share your idea with this online form.](#)

Stephanie Falkers, AICP



Stephanie, Director of Community Planning at TC2, brings more than 15 years of experience as a planner and engager. She is passionate about working with communities to explore goals and identify future actions through close collaboration with staff, residents, and stakeholders. Her work focuses on creating collaborative environments where people can share experiences, learn from one another, and develop meaningful, implementable solutions. Stephanie is excited to be returning to APA MN in a new role as District Director and is especially enthusiastic about exploring new ways to connect APA with partner organizations, expanding continuing education and social opportunities, and creating spaces where planners can learn and explore together.

When she's not planning, Stephanie is happiest outdoors, hiking, horseback riding, gardening, or camping with her family (preferably with a good bonfire). She's known to bake a mean sourdough loaf and is always up for catching a show or happy hour with friends.

METRO DISTRICT UPDATE (continued)

Lance Bernard



Lance is the Director of Planning at TC2, bringing more than 20 years of professional planning experience to his role. A long-time volunteer within APA Minnesota, he has chaired several conferences and served as the organization's President from 2009 to 2013. Outside of work, Lance is an avid bicyclist, a year-round tent camper, a flyfishing enthusiast, a devoted vinyl record collector, and a frequent explorer of New Orleans.

Dakota Kastenday



Dakota is currently a Long-Range Planning Supervisor with the City of Bloomington, leading the city's 2050 Comprehensive Plan update. Dakota's interests in planning relate to affordable housing policy, health equity, and community engagement.

Dakota lives in the Nokomis East neighborhood in Minneapolis with his husband and their dog Tobin. In his spare time, he enjoys biking the various trails throughout the metro, learning how to start a new backyard garden, and listening to too many podcasts.

DISTRICT NEWS

NORTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

The Detroit Lakes Trolls: A placemaking case study for Minnesota planners

Figure 1. Ronny Funny Face (Project 412)



In summer 2024, Detroit Lakes unveiled a whimsical, citywide treasure hunt of giant wooden trolls designed by Danish recycled wood artist Thomas Dambo. The installation known as “Alexa’s Elixir” is now touted as the artist’s largest U.S. exhibition to date and already celebrated by *TIME* as one of the [“World’s Greatest Places” for 2025](#). The project marries public art, outdoor recreation, and regional storytelling to spur sustainable tourism, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors per year. The trolls placemaking approach is ripe with lessons for professional planners across Minnesota working on destination development, downtown vitality, and trail-based activation.

What-and who- is behind the Trolls?

Artist & concept. [Thomas Dambo](#) is known worldwide for building giant trolls from reclaimed wood and other salvaged materials, placing them outdoors so visitors “discover” them and, in doing so, rediscover nature. The Detroit Lakes installation continues that tradition while advancing a circular-economy message.

Local sponsor & civic coalition. The community-led nonprofit [Project 412](#) sponsored the Detroit Lakes exhibition with support from various local businesses, individuals, foundations, the City of Detroit Lakes, and Becker County. Project 412 organized more than 300 local volunteers who helped fabricate sculptures and assemble supporting elements like birdhouses. The collaboration spanned local attractions and agencies, positioning the trolls as a shared civic asset rather than a single-site art piece. Project 412 frames the series as a permanent, all-season exhibition (with a winter safety caveat) and publishes on-the-ground guidance for wayfinding and stewardship.

Figure 2. Troll Portal Installation/Clue (Project 412)



Scale & storyline. The narrative of “Alexa’s Elixir,” ties together five giant trolls: Alexa’s Elixir, Ronny Funny Face, Barefoot Frida, Jacob EverEar, and Long Leif. Additionally, there is a hidden Golden Rabbit and three “mirror portal” installations. The portals extend the story and visitor flow nearly 70-miles across the region from Fargo, ND and Perham, MN to Detroit Lakes.

NORTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

(continued)

Where are the Trolls?

Detroit Lakes [intentionally keeps exact troll locations \(mostly\) secret](#) to preserve the treasure hunt experience and disperse visitors. The journey begins at Detroit Lakes City Park, where Alexa's Elixir holds a giant storybook with riddles that lead to the other trolls. From there, clues guide visitors to public places and trails in and around the city.

Figure 3. Alexa's Elixir Detroit Lakes City Park (Project 412)



- **Showcasing Local Recreational/Trail Opportunities.** Representative sites include Detroit Lakes City Park (Alexa's Elixir), Dunton Locks County Park (Ronny Funny Face), Detroit Mountain Recreation Area (Long Leif), and others not listed here to keep the experience alive. Each site offers different trail experiences and degrees of accessibility; however, it should be noted that several sites are not ADA accessible.
- **Regional reach.** The three "mirror portals" tie Detroit Lakes to Perham, MN and downtown Fargo, ND (Roberts Alley), extending the adventure and economic impact across states and jurisdictions.

Project materials recommend starting at the City Park, then using the storybook (and a troll alphabet cipher) to decode the final location of the Golden Rabbit.

Project 412 emphasizes visiting during daylight, staying on marked trails, and understanding that some approaches are not maintained in winter, which is a useful operational detail for planners considering four season programming and liability.

How the Trolls are driving tourism

A Minnesota-lakes country destination with national pull. Since opening, the trolls have complemented an already bustling tourism-driven, lakes country economy, and have drawn visitors from around the U.S. and beyond, spurred by word of mouth, regional media, and the novelty of a story-driven hunt through existing parks and trails. The Detroit Lakes Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau documents travel parties arriving specifically for the trolls and sharing their "hunt" itineraries, photos, and anecdotes on dedicated "Thomas Dambo Troll Hunter" social media pages.

Extended stays via distributed sites. Because the sculptures and portals are spread across multiple parks and towns, visitors are encouraged to allocate more than a day, and are required to travel by car or bicycle to complete the circuit. The distributed itinerary locations benefit lodging, dining, and retail across the region.

Hospitality alignment. Local hotels and attractions have built troll hunt content and packages into their marketing, amplifying the draw and helping guests plan efficient routes with parking

NORTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

(continued)

pointers and difficulty notes (e.g., begin at City Park; expect short hikes at some sites, etc.).

Figure 1. Community-Built Birdhouses (Project 412)



Nature + art synergy. The installation includes 800+ birdhouses, which dovetail with Detroit Lakes’ reputation as a birding hotspot and subtly guide wayfinding on the trails—blending habitat support with placemaking.

Longevity matters. Explore Minnesota notes the trolls are intended as multi-year installations, which supports repeat visitation, all-season trips, and integration into annual events.

Takeaways for Minnesota Planners

1) **Public-private-nonprofit alignment.** A civic nonprofit (Project 412) served as the convener and sponsor, enabling cross sector resource sharing, volunteer mobilization, and regionwide buy-in. The collaborative organizational structure smoothed permitting and site agreements across City, County, and private lands, and fostered a shared responsibility. This approach would be replicable for art trail or heritage trail concepts elsewhere in Minnesota.

2) Narrative driven wayfinding = experiential tourism.

The storybook quest, troll alphabet, and mirror portals convert passive viewing into an active, inter-generational game that motivates travel between nodes by solving riddles. The secrecy around exact locations protects the experience and disperses crowds—valuable for sensitive natural areas and small trailheads. A sense of “real discovery” is a big part of the draw for visitors.

3) Sustainability as both process and message.

Using recycled wood for large-scale art pairs environmental ethos with photogenic design, reinforcing community sustainability goals while lowering materials costs and garnering media attention.

4) Distributed programming to boost dwell time.

Placing installations across multiple parks and communities (Detroit Lakes, Perham, and Fargo) broadens the tax base impact and encourages overnight stays, especially when official guidance suggests allowing more than a day to see everything. Future iterations should consider better alignment with transit, bike routes, and ADA accessibility for a more inclusive experience.

5) Operations: seasons, safety, and stewardship.

Clear guidance on winter trail conditions, daylight visitation, and stay on trail etiquette helps manage risk while welcoming year round use, as applicable. This is an instructive model for parks departments integrating temporary or permanent outdoor sculptures along natural-surface trails. Vandalism is one of the largest concerns, given the sculptures’ construction materials and rural locations.

6) Marketing + media lift.

Positioning the trolls within a statewide narrative (via Explore Minnesota) and earning national recognition (e.g., *TIME*’s best of 2025 list) magnified reach. This is great evidence that destination-scale

NORTHWEST DISTRICT UPDATE

(continued)

In the first six months after installation, it is estimated the Troll installation saw 100,000 visitors and increased tourism-related spending by \$6 million. In peak summer months, the trolls see up to 1,000 visitors per day.

placemaking can compete for national travel attention when the concept is cohesive and photogenic, such as Alexa's Elixir.

Figure 6. Barefoot Frida (Project 412)



Practical tips if you're considering a "Troll-style" initiative

- 1) Tell a story.** A compelling narrative (like "Alexa's Elixir") ties nodes together, invites repeat visits, and avoids the "one and done selfie" pitfall. Build an interpretive layer (physical booklet, app, or geocache) to deepen engagement.
- 2) Find a sponsor who can convene.** A nimble non-profit can bridge city, county, Chamber, Tourism Bureau, and private landowners while recruiting volunteers at scale.
- 3) Design for dispersion.** Use intentionally distributed sites to relieve or enhance existing tourism hot spots, stimulate neighboring main streets and com-

mercial nodes, and encourage multi night itineraries.

4) Mind accessibility and seasons. Provide parking info, difficulty ratings, and winter advisories up front; align with accessible trail segments where feasible and communicate clearly where they aren't.

5) Leverage hospitality. Encourage hotels and attractions to offer troll hunt guides or packages so visitors have turnkey plans (and local businesses benefit).

6) Measure and iterate. Pair visitor intercepts with mobile friendly maps and optional check ins to quantify economic impact without spoiling secret sites. (Detroit Lakes' approach shows that even without publishing coordinates, you can still capture useful data across the network including estimates of troll visitors and changes in tourism-based spending.)

Why this matters

Detroit Lakes demonstrates how creative placemaking can knit together parks, downtowns, and neighboring communities into a coherent regional experience. One that supports and builds from local identity, elevates sustainability, and drives tourism without major bricks and mortar builds. The trolls' blend of art, outdoor recreation, and narrative is particularly relevant for communities looking to activate existing trail systems, diversify year-round offerings, and cultivate volunteer powered projects with lasting civic pride.

DISTRICT NEWS

NORTHEAST DISTRICT UPDATE



Open Space: A Cherished and Overlooked Asset

*By: Lance Bernard
APA MN Metro District
Director*

Open space plays an important role in how communities' function. From a planning perspective, it is part of the basic framework that supports public

health, ecological resilience, and quality of life. Open spaces give people the chance to experience the outdoors, recharge, and briefly pretend they don't have 138 unread emails about an affordable housing project.

Some places offer these benefits at a neighborhood scale through parks and small natural areas. Others do so on a regional or national scale. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is one of the most significant examples of a large, protected open space that serves people (and habitat) well beyond its immediate surroundings.

The current debate over mining in and around the Boundary Waters illustrates how even the most cherished public lands can be reshaped by changing land-use decisions. At its core is a fundamental question: should land be treated primarily as a commodity for development, or as a shared resource that sustains wildlife habitat, community well-being, and environmental health? These questions have taken on new urgency with the passage of House Joint Resolution 140 (H.J. Res. 140), which rolls back more than two decades of conservation by reopening over 225,000 acres of federally protected land near the Boundary Waters to mineral leasing.

Planners work within complex regulations, environmental review processes, and long-term growth strategies. However, the underlying issue here is simple. Once large-

scale resource extraction begins in an area like the Boundary Waters, the landscape is permanently changed. Those changes cannot be undone through typical mitigation or restoration. Acknowledging this is part of responsible land use planning.

For people who have spent time in the Boundary Waters, the place often carries personal meaning. It might be paddling across quiet water or sitting around a campfire debating why the Minnesota Twins find new ways to break your heart every season. For me, it includes all those memories, and the reminder of what land use planning (e.g., open space preservation) means in our work.

Returning to the question of how we value open space as planners is important. Not every parcel is suited for development, and not every untouched area should be viewed as an opportunity for growth. This is something communities should reflect on when updating their Comprehensive Plans. For example, communities across the state already have places that would benefit from meaningful reinvestment, including vacant lots that can support new housing, underused parcels that can accommodate a mix of uses, and commercial corridors that need to be converted into walkable environments. Focusing on these investments first allows us to guide growth in ways that strengthen existing neighborhoods while avoiding expansion into natural areas or undeveloped land.

Overall, the conversation surrounding the Boundary Waters reflects a larger question about how we balance future growth with the need to protect land for environmental, cultural, and recreational purposes. As planners, we have a responsibility to evaluate long-term consequences and to recognize that some landscapes maintain their greatest value only when left untouched.

To learn more and find ways to support the Boundary Waters, visit:

<https://www.savetheboundarywaters.org/bill-passed-house-overturn-mining-ban-near-boundary-waters> 26

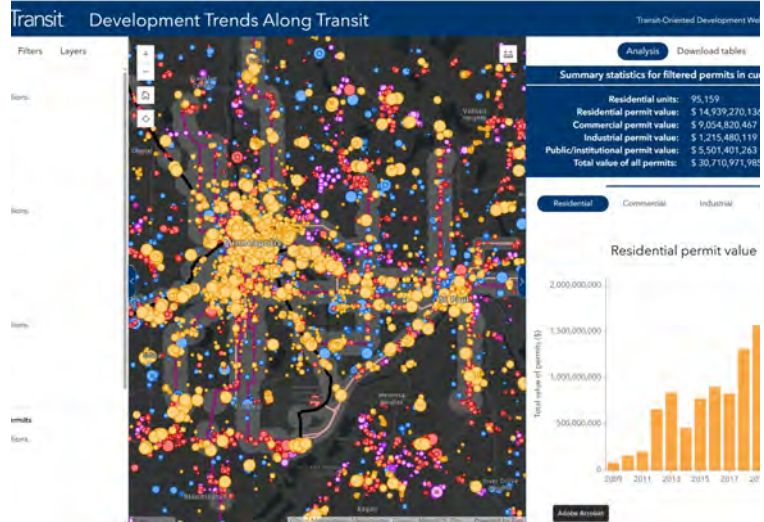
RESOURCES AND REPORTS



TREND REPORT FOR PLANNERS

The fifth Trend Report for Planners developed by the American Planning Association (APA) in partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. As in previous years, the core of this Trend Report is a list of the most impactful existing, emerging, and potential future trends identified as relevant to planning. The trends are structured within three timeframes (Act Now, Prepare, Learn and Watch), indicating the urgency of planners' action.

This report can be found here: [2026 APA Trend Report for Planners](#)

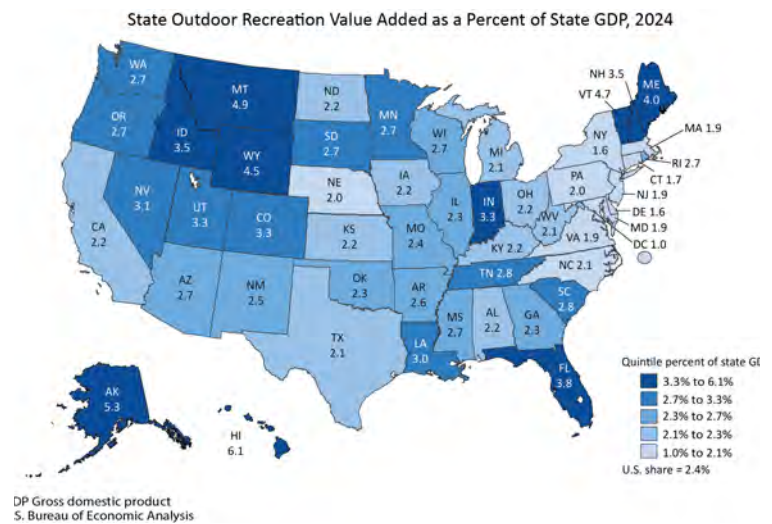


DEVELOPMENT ALONG TRANSIT

The Development Trends Along Transit (DTAT) interactive mapping application was created by the Metro Transit TOD Office to showcase the DTAT data in relation to existing and planned high frequency transit facilities across the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area of Minnesota. This app provides transparent public access to the same data processed for the annual DTAT Report.

This tool can be found here: [Development Trends Along Transit](#)

Resources and Reports (continued)



CLIMATE ADAPTION COST STUDY

This study quantifies the projected cost of adaptation under future emissions scenarios beyond current costs. This study should not be considered a comprehensive accounting of all potential adaptation actions in Minnesota nor is it a prescriptive roadmap for adaptation in the state. Rather, this analysis provides a well-founded estimate of the magnitude of necessary adaptation investments to address projected climate impacts.

The tool can be found here: [Minnesota Climate Adaptation and Resilience Cost Study](#)

OUTDOOR RECREATION DATA UPDATE

These statistics measure the economic activity as well as the sales or receipts generated by outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing and RVing. These statistics also measure each industry's production of outdoor goods and services and its contribution to U.S. GDP.

Industry breakdowns of outdoor employment and compensation are also included.

The data can be found here: [Outdoor Recreation | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\)](#)



JOB OPENINGS AND RFPS

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

https://www.planningmn.org/view_job_postings

https://www.planningmn.org/view_rfp_postings

Recent job postings include:

- Intermediate Planner, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Code Compliance Inspector, City of Apple Valley
- Senior Planner, City of Monticello
- Economic and Community Development Specialist, City of Willmar
- Intermediate Planner, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Assistant Planner, City of Winona
- Planning and Zoning Administrator, Cook County
- Transportation Planner or Senior Transportation Planner, Metropolitan Council

Recent requests for proposals include:

- Comprehensive Plan Update, City of Richfield
- Comprehensive Plan Update, City of Chanhassen
- Comprehensive Plan Update, City of Apple Valley
- Housing Study, City of Eden Prairie
- Redevelopment Project, City of Cloquet



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