I went to college in St. Louis, and I recently returned there for a summer internship. The city is a subtle, complicated, history-soaked place. In many ways, it is a hollowed-out version of its former self, haunted by many years of disinvestment. At the same time, it is the stuff of brochures: the Gateway Arch, magnificent city parks, excellent museums, local cuisine, major universities, historic architecture, and so on.

Observing the city from the ground brings its native peculiarity into full view. When I walk around St. Louis, I see a sleeper bubbling to life again through the interstices of its shell. It is made of its homegrown brick, painted and unpainted, embroidered with cast-iron moldings and hand-drawn building names and numbers. Remnants of the city’s past accumulate in people’s homes, in photographs, in cafés, and in the restoration of old buildings. The restoration of these old buildings is especially important for revitalizing neighborhoods and carrying the city’s character into the future.

While developers and planners reshape the city in broader strokes, residents and small organizations operate at a finer grain. Take one summer evening when I went to an event called Sloup, held at an organic farm which used to be just an empty lot. For ten dollars I ate homemade soup, drank (non-Budweiser) local beer, conversed with other young St. Louis enthusiasts, and supported a community art initiative. The city is filled with these sorts of gems—places and events and ongoing projects that keep its blood moving and make its heart beat louder and louder.

I recommend a wide-eyed, open-hearted visit to St. Louis. When I’m there, I see the city’s eloquence in its every gesture—its physical form and its residents, their kindness and concern.
As I peered down the vista towards the Chesapeake Bay, the foreground was bustling with activity amidst the 18th and 19th Century buildings that lined the blocks before me. Setting out on foot to explore the city for the first time I had an end destination in mind, but, as usual, the path to reach that point was both sporadic and circuitous.

My goal was to explore the plan of Historic Annapolis laid out by Governor Francis Nicholson in 1696. The plan uses topography to emphasize St. Anne’s Episcopal Church and the Maryland State House – both are situated on the highest points of downtown Annapolis and designed to take advantage of the view corridors established by the plan. Each building is surrounded by a traffic circle that intersects with radiating streets, ultimately connecting the emblematic landmarks to downtown and the waterfront. The traffic circles are aptly named Church Circle and State Circle.

The plan of Annapolis is as symbolic as it is functional. Although it appears irregular in design, the baroque plan of the city intentionally creates the opportunity for framed spaces that accentuate ceremonial and monumental architecture, planned vistas, and pedestrian-friendly streets.

As a planner, Annapolis feels comfortable. It affords the opportunity for pleasant public spaces and enthralling walks. Most buildings are 3 stories or less, creating a unique sense of history, enclosure, and place. Numerous brick sidewalks and streets add an unrivaled richness and memorability to the downtown.

As every planner knows, there are intangible elements that most great cities possess. In the case of Annapolis, it is the ability of its historic downtown to evoke a sense of history, symbolism, and character while creating a feeling of unique comfort and place.
My One City:
Paris
Submitted by William Mackey

Whenever fellow planners comment to me that there is no “perfect city,” I disagree. Paris has it all.

What is so special about Paris? As the capital of the French nation and its culture for a thousand years, Paris has the accumulated grandeur, art, architecture and excitement of both L’Ancien Régime and the succession of turbulent political, social, sexual and artistic revolutions that followed the great Monarchy.

Paris itself is an enormous work of art. The concentration of an entire nation’s power and personality into a single, physical space provided the energy. The choice location over a seemingly endless supply of sparkling white, easily carved stone provided the material; and, the particular interest of the French in all things refined provided the inspiration to create an endless terrain of delightful, hand-carved, white stone facades and urban spaces that stretch in every direction. Paris has no rival because not only are her buildings and spaces especially beautiful, well-crafted and harmonious, but they continue unbroken at a scale that is really hard to understand until you start walking. It literally takes days in any direction.

Over a thousand churches, the world’s largest and best museums, a serene balance of building height to street width, and the punctuation of spires and civic monuments stretch from horizon to horizon. No other city seems to have captured the imagination of the world for so many centuries as Paris. But what I love most is her architecture. Such a banquet from every small doorway to the most elaborate spaces that overwhelm the senses! Paris is a textbook on the truly extraordinary. But there’s more – art, haute couture, cuisine, literature, café culture – and this superabundance of refinement never ceases. And it’s accessible at every street corner.

En toi le monde entier chante et sourit – Paris! Voici Paris!
"My One City" is the cityette of Silver Spring, a suburb of Washington DC. Why? Because its story is one that speaks to how we can reinvent our suburbs by creating walkable centers that are not only well designed, but are strong communities.

Silver Spring has already moved away from its suburban origins of homogeneity to one of variety. There are many ages and cultures in public places – including an Ethiopian hang out corner at the local Starbucks. Yes, it has national chains but they are interspersed with local businesses. Saturday nights bring colorful lights and activities to the public spaces. A drum circle sometimes magically appears on the civic plaza – which also has rocking chairs. There’s a local hardware store, and a grand performing arts center, with marquee. There is an annual “Silver Docs Film Festival” at the historic Silver Theater and Discovery’s “Shark Week” when they dress their building as a shark, fin and all. There are grocery stores, artists’ studios and local ethnic restaurants. You can people watch at the play fountain on a summer day while listening to live music. You can enjoy a reused early 1930’s strip shopping center, or the 1940’s Canada Dry Bottling Plant architecture that is carefully designed into a new building.

There’s more to the story for planners to consider: the public sector involvement: the planning, the big investment, the drama of courting purveyors of the arts, the local community’s rabid participation in all things important, including a protest in support of freedom of photography in the privately managed public spaces.

So Silver Spring is “my one city”. While it is still growing into its role as a city, it speaks well for the future of the suburbs... and shows that we can reinvent them and make even better places.
APA could not have picked a better destination for the National Conference than Boston. This is my favorite city, for many obvious reasons. Boston has the historical charm that many new cities lack, and many older cities failed to preserve. Just taking the “T” (America’s first subway) leads you into this experience, as you travel through quaint New England towns with vast colonial architecture resembling a picturesque holiday postcard. Once you are in the city, you can explore its historical heritage by walking along the Freedom Trail. This trail brings history alive — more so than the HBO miniseries “John Adams” — as you see the Old South Meeting House still standing in the midst of a modernized Central Business District, among other historical buildings. You can literally visualize thousands of Bostonians crowding into this tiny room to protest British taxes on tea, ultimately leading to the Boston Tea Party and setting the stage for the American Revolution. This provides Boston its character and charm.

Boston also has the most beautiful and vibrant neighborhoods. Beacon Hill is an obvious example with its gas powered streets lamps, cobblestone streets, and gorgeous brick colonial exterior. Another must visit neighborhood is the North End. This Italian district is a step into a traditional Italian village. It has energy — everyone seems to know each other, either as friends or family. The most fabulous smells known to mankind are also found here, from fresh baked canolis to handmade pastas.

And who can discuss Boston without mentioning its accent? Oh how I cannot wait until April to eat “lobstah” on the “harbah”.

Quick Facts

Country: United States

What Makes It the “One”?

- Well-preserved “historical charm”, including the Old South Meeting House
- Public transportation – the “T”, America’s first subway
- “Beautiful and vibrant neighborhoods”, including Beacon Hill and the North End
- “Lobstah” rolls and that unmistakable accent!
My One City:  
Poughkeepsie, New York  
Submitted by Emily Johnson

Poughkeepsie, NY is not a sexy city, like San Francisco, Chicago, or New York-- but then, most cities aren’t. Like most places, it struggles with a changing economy, regional sprawl, and service provision in an anti-tax climate. It is the interplay of these issues against the backdrop of Poughkeepsie’s rich history, beautiful setting, and diverse population that make it a rewarding place to be a planner.

Poughkeepsie was first settled by the Wappinger Indians, then “re-discovered” by Henry Hudson’s 1609 voyage, and flourished in the boom of the 1800s, still evident in stately homes and civic buildings like the Bardavon Theater, Cuneen-Hackett Arts Center, and Adriance Memorial Library. This “Queen City of the Hudson” sits halfway between New York and Albany. The river, once heavily polluted, is now clean enough for swimming.

The city is culturally diverse, with strong Italian, Greek, African-American, Irish, Caribbean, and a growing Mexican community represented in local businesses and celebrations. While the surrounding area struggles with suburban sprawl and strip development, it is also home to farms, farmer’s markets, and high-quality restaurants supporting a growing local food movement. The three-lane, one-way couplet known locally as “the Arterial” is an ugly reminder of the effects of urban renewal on neighborhoods. And yet, forward thinking recently prevailed with the opening of the Walkway Over the Hudson—the world’s longest pedestrian bridge, which brings visitors and residents together to share spectacular views.

Downtown has its share of empty storefronts, but local developers are renovating old industrial buildings, the City is assisting Main Street with façade improvements, and determined entrepreneurs are opening small businesses throughout the city.

It is these challenges and contradictions that make a city interesting. And when you take the time to discover Poughkeepsie, you find a lot to love.
In 1683, William Penn found himself designing a city of firsts. Philadelphia is the first city in America to have been designed in a gridiron pattern; the first city to plat public gardens in each neighborhood; and the first city to have been designed to spatially feature the primacy of its City Hall.

In 2009, Mayor Nutter declared Philadelphia’s next mission: to become the Greenest City in America. From retrofitting its classic rowhomes for energy conservation, to planting 100,000 trees for air quality, to successful and innovative bike- and car-sharing programs, this urban area is making another mark in history as an urban area saturated in sustainable living. A pending design incorporates an homage to Penn in which neighborhoods will have access green space through an archipelago of parks dotting the Delaware River.

Philadelphia has taken advantage of the luxury of historical development and adaptability, and the result is not only diversity among the neighborhoods, but the temporal generation of spatial boundaries. Old City, Queen’s Village, Fishtown, Rittenhouse, New Kensington, University City, Passyunk Square, Northern Liberties are in constant revival and planners can find comfort in knowing neighborhood longevity, at least in Philadelphia, is not determined by the character of its architecture but by the character of its people.

Every time I show guests around Philadelphia, they seem amazed at how personable everyone is. Servers ask your name, people at the park ask you to watch their dog for a second as they grab a quick coffee from the cart. After witnessing a jaywalker almost get caught by the wrong side of a taxi, my brother and I had a two-block conversation with a complete stranger about how much better Philadelphia is than New York. The seasoned Philadelphian pedestrian said, “In New York, they’d hit you and keep going.” Welcome to the City of Brotherly Love.
My One City:
Miami, Florida
Submitted by Melissa Hege

It’s the City that we love to hate. Traffic, road rage, gated communities, endless suburbs, strip malls, hurricanes, mosquitos the size of Suburbans, and melting hot summers. And forget about walking if you’re in the Banana Republic. Its urban landscape is reminiscent of a third world country with drivers to match.

But for all its vices, Miami is a hard place to leave. It is a city with a pulse. You can see it in the people who have settled here. You can hear it in the different languages spoken on the street, in the office, at home. You can smell it at the coffee shops in Little Havana, in the hallways of apartment buildings in Miami Beach, outside the restaurants in Little Haiti. And you can see it in the contrast among the tremendously wealthy waterfront communities a quarter of a mile away from the poorest and culturally rich neighborhoods in the City, the immigrant families who struggle with the language, and the gay community that has built a life here.

It’s a City that continues to reinvent itself as it struggles with politics. It collectively changed South Beach from an enclave for retired northerners, to a cultural destination which hosts Art Basel, one of the most important art fairs in the world. It convinced people to move into Downtown by developing sleek new towers with spectacular views. And it is presently transforming abandoned warehouses by the highway into the Wynwood Art District, with exterior gallery space, emerging restaurants, entertainment venues, and alternative workspaces.

Somewhere north of Daytona Beach, the water turns from blue to mucky brown. In Miami the water is clear turquoise blue. It’s this magical landscape that motivates the community—persuading them to endure the horrendous traffic for the rich and dynamic place they call home.
JinHua, a medium sized city in an eastern Chinese province, ZheJiang, has grown a lot in size during the recent three decades. The new additions tend to be high rises designed for the automobile, and have brought diversity and sometimes striking contrast to the cityscape that used to feature narrow alleys and traditional closely spaced low-rises.

One famous new infrastructure addition in the recent years is a twin-tower building for the local branch of the “Best Western” hotel. Located next to one of the busiest urban arterials in the city, it is a grand looking building, probably the grandest “Best Western” hotel in the world. Across the street from the twin tower is another recent development: a residential community of high-rises interestingly named “Yosemite” in sound and syllables or “Beautiful Land that Inspires Exquisite Poetry” in literal translation. The median of the segment of arterial dividing these two groups of buildings is a long sliver of park. The plants in the park look luxuriant and inviting. However, to reach the park from either side, one has to walk across a broad crosswalk, which could be quite hazardous during certain periods of the day.

The namesake, design, and appearance of the new infrastructure described above add an unmistakable modern aura to the city. During my recent visit to the city, standing in the isolated green park and feeling impressed by the view of the grand western hotel and the waterless “Yosemite” across the street, a quote I once read came to my mind.

“Slow down and enjoy life. It’s not only the scenery you miss by going too fast--you also miss the sense of where you are going and why.” -- Eddie Cantor

Cantor’s wisdom in the above quote applies to planning as well as life. It is a wisdom city architects in Jinhua as well as elsewhere might want to keep in mind to remind them to slow down in catering auto needs and rethink where the city really wants to head: living suitability or growth for growth sake?
Every time I return home to Greenfield from the ever-changing Atlanta, I am struck at how this small city possesses everything that the Capital of the South wishes it could have back: A downtown theater occupies one end of an in-tact and busy Main Street, with a rare independent (and healthy!) department store anchoring the center. A rail/bus station is under construction nearby. Wooded parkland along the river offers easy access to trails, views, even a skating pond. A grid of affordable housing is overlooked by grand old houses on a hill. And all within a pleasant walk of each other.

Of course, Greenfield has always operated on a completely different scale than Atlanta, its vision never seemingly much more than to be a reliable hometown worth coming back to someday. At the same time, the absence of glittering, ambitious projects (or hopeless demolition) that would upend the layout or building stock demonstrates a faith in its founding decisions - after all, Greenfield was one of the first American towns to reject a Wal-Mart development back in 1993. Sure enough, people are taking another look.

On a recent walk into town for Christmas shopping, I noticed a classic transect scenario unfold: open sky and cemeteries gave way to new mixed-income “solar village” housing on an infill lot near the fairgrounds, and then to a gateway of the multi-modal station surrounded by small-scale, repurposed industrial buildings. Main Street loomed up the hill, its parking properly tucked behind the solid thoroughfare of 3-4-story buildings fronted by wide sidewalks. It was a clear destination – a real place of evolution, and graceful aging.

There will always be problems – large industry has shriveled, houses often display a certain grit. Even Wal-Mart lurks again. Whatever the outcome, I have faith Greenfield will always stand its ground.
A city of verticals, where centuries of architecture and history rest upon and between volcanic crags and sweeping green garden valleys, and where every direction opens both startling urban drama and intimate, carved, used and weathered stone. It is perhaps the most memorable interplay of city architecture and natural landforms. Where soaring medieval facades interplay with the gentile classical compositions defining both sides of the gradual ascent of the Royal Mile from Holyrood House towards the castle on the most majestic crag of all, only appreciated in all its sheer drama from most other vantage points.

Experiencing around this historic city spine both the inspiration and enhancements of Sir Patrick Geddes, as he worked and taught from his Camera Obscura Outlook Tower, establishing some of the essential principals of sound planning rationale, nationally and overseas. Punctuated by civic and religious monuments, worn stairs, corner stones and paving, old and new, the Old Town of Edinburgh exudes the history of Scotland and Britain from each pore of every building in this very European capital.

Just as the fascination of peeling back the layers of history in sinuous and sometimes terraced medieval streetscapes seems without end, there comes the realization that to the north lies the 18th Century Georgian New Town, built over three phases. This studied geometrical elegance of wide streets, squares, circus and crescents is perhaps the most complete manifestation of the art of the design of the city in Britain, where each building is a part of a much grander composition of the architecture and art of the street façade. The sandstone facades are complemented by columns, doorcases, front steps, the decorative ironwork of railings and street lamps, interwoven paving stone, paving slabs, and granite setts, as they descend towards the north and the Firth of Forth.
My One City: Dunedin
Submitted by Akshali Gandhi

As the oldest city in New Zealand, Dunedin has so many faces that it would take years to discover them all. Yet, as a student, it was my job to uncover the raw Southern culture beneath the urban fabric of the Otago region. To do this, I embarked on a half day adventure ‘tramping’ up and down the winding, hilly roads of ‘Dunners,’ when I began to notice how the country’s gold-rush laden past had fermented itself onto the city.

Dunedin was New Zealand’s first town and its crowning jewel in the late 19th Century. Like East Coast cities in the United States, Dunedin became a hub for multiple ethnicities, including the Maori and Chinese. It was the Scots, however, whose culture was adopted into the built environment. Using the Gold Rush as a catalyst for growth, affluent European immigrants were able to design fine Victorian architecture and wide tree-lined boulevards against naturally magnificent terminating vistas: the native mountains and forests of the Otago region. It is easy to see the resemblance to Scotland; cathedrals sprout out on every other street corner, and a bagpipe band can usually be heard ‘busking’ the streets on Saturdays. Gaelic for “Edinburgh,” Dunedin’s Scottish heritage permeates the Central Business District: flags display emblems of Scottish architecture, Town Hall plaques commemorate Scottish legends like Robert Arthur Lawson, and of course, the famous statue of writer Robert Burns sits proudly in the center of the Octagon. Acting as the central node where everyone “goes to town,” the inner and outer rings of the Octagon bustle with shops and rugby crowds. Because downtown is very pedestrian-friendly, all streets and curbs seem to lead to this spot.

Though steeped in history, a youthful vibe resonates throughout this hilly terrain. By reading a city as text, I found Dunedin to be a place of contrast: a vibrant learning center steeped in Scottish wealth and ancestry, yet also a hinterland escape bordered by rugged natural hillsides and old remains of industry down by the harbor.
A post-industrial “shrinking city” on a challenging revitalization trajectory, empowered by its underlying century old fertile farmlands, a stunning historic abandoned building stock, 5.5 miles of riverfront awaiting reuse, over 13,000 theatre seats within 2 blocks awaiting revival, and the landmark political platform of Martin Luther King’s first delivery of “I Have A Dream.” The City of Detroit has been a living laboratory of community driven social, cultural, physical and economic revival.

Collaborative urban farming has generated 900 urban gardens restoring tax-delinquent, resource-draining urban blight to pastoral productivity, providing jobs and fresh produce to families, local markets, restaurants and soup kitchens, and stimulating community life. Detroit is a promising pioneer in urban agriculture at a commercial scale.

The Dequindre Cut Greenway, a 1.35 mile urban recreational path and formerly a Grand Trunk Railway line, opened in May 2009. Developed through a public, nonprofit, and private partnership, it is a pedestrian and bicycle link between the Riverfront, Eastern Market, and residential neighborhoods in between. Besides showcasing a superb example of adaptive reuse of derelict infrastructure, it is also an important example for reconnecting neighborhoods. Goodwill De-Construction Project is helping people to salvage good parts from abandoned houses and transform other abandoned houses into decent homes to live in.

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy founded in 2003 has been involved in conceptualization and implementation of the Detroit RiverWalk and associated green spaces. These initiatives have greatly contributed towards re-branding Detroit as a livable city.

Campus Martius, the geographic origin of Detroit, was revamped in 2004 into an active, year-round, public open space for cultural and social exchange as a result of a public-private partnership. ULI named it the Top US Urban Park and APA named it one of the Top Great Public Spaces in 2010.

The City of Detroit is truly a model city for the transformation of post-industrial urban fabrics in America.
My One City:
Davis, California
Submitted by Siam Pewsawant

Standing in the middle of Central Park in Downtown Davis on any given Saturday morning, one is greeted by the fragrant aroma of farm fresh produce with just a hint of kettle corn and cotton candy. Bustling sounds of commerce and casual conversation fill the air. Here, politicians socialize with constituents, vendors hawk their goods, while professors and students alike shop for the week’s groceries, together. Through shared spaces and shared experiences, Davis benefits everyday from the design of its built environment that encourages connections through human oriented scale and accessibility.

Davis is best known for its excellent bicycle infrastructure. A little over half of the system (52 miles) has its own right of way (ROW), with 19 grade-separated crossings - including three bicycle-dedicated freeway overpasses. The system runs partly through a continuous and integrated green belt network to which relevant destinations like parks, libraries, schools, hospitals, and grocery stores are easily accessible. When combined with the on-street facilities, the total system covers just over 100 miles in a city that is no bigger than 10 square miles.

Planners should take note at how the city and the University mutually benefit from one another. Pedestrian friendly streets that limit motor-vehicle traffic while encouraging walking and biking line the porous boundary between UC Davis and the city. Once downtown, street-oriented, human scaled storefronts cater to pedestrians rather than cars. Restaurants and cafes with outdoor patios line sidewalks creating a vibrant street environment.

What many planners hope to accomplish ultimately comes down to the creation of enjoyable and functional spaces. Davis succeeds at utilizing its resources (flat land, location adjacent to a major University, mild climate) to create suitable infrastructure that encourages connectivity and healthy lifestyles.
My One City:
Burlington, Vermont
Submitted by Raymond Hayhurst

Nestled between the verdant Green Mountains and majestic Lake Champlain is the small city of Burlington, Vermont. The city’s beautiful natural setting is a perfect backdrop to an equally beautiful and vibrant community. Not surprisingly, Burlington offers a lot of lessons that planners can not only appreciate, but also draw from in order to improve the communities they work in.

At the heart of downtown Burlington is the Church Street Marketplace, a four-block long pedestrian mall that has become the city’s most thriving public space. Unlike most pedestrian malls across the country, Church Street is active around the clock and offers great shopping, dining, arts, and nightlife experience. The majority of the businesses in Church Street are locally owned, a testament to political and business leadership that values long-term economic sustainability. Church Street Marketplace also benefits from successful historic preservation efforts that have saved many of the two to three story buildings that front the public space. New infill development, with street-oriented retail, adds to the quality urban fabric and makes for a very enjoyable pedestrian experience.

Just down the street from Church Street is the revitalized Burlington waterfront, the former location of the city’s industrial and port activities. Through public-private partnerships, the waterfront has been reclaimed by the community, and now contains a highly used pedestrian and bicycle trail, marina, open space, and lake aquarium and science center. An abundance of parks and infrastructure improvements, combined with walkable residential neighborhoods, allows Burlingtonites to live active and healthy lifestyles. In addition, a strong local food movement has led to a more sustainable and secure food system with great benefits for all residents.

Burlington is a city where the quality of life and built environment matches the quality of the surrounding natural environment.

Quick Facts
Country: United States
Population: 38,647 (2009)

What Makes It the “One”?
- “Beautiful natural setting”
- Church Street Marketplace – a “thriving public space” with locally owned businesses, preserved historic buildings, and street-oriented retail
- “Political and business leadership that values long-term economic sustainability”
- Appreciation of the natural environment with pedestrian and bicycle trails and “an abundance of parks”
- “Strong local food movement” provides a more sustainable way of life for its residents

Image courtesy of Raymond Hayhurst.

Image courtesy of Steve Jones.
President William J. Clinton once said, “Washington, America’s Capital, is a world capital – a city of remarkable strengths. Its proud face reflects many of our Nations greatest memories, achievements and aspirations.” Over 20 million people visit the Nation’s Capital each year. Many of which begin at the Monumental Core, which extends from the steps of the Capitol along the Mall and to the Lincoln Memorial.

Washington has been described as "a city of magnificent distances," and the many who have seen it would agree. Its broad avenues, buildings, monuments, memorials and expansive public spaces are reminders of America’s democratic values, symbolizing a government that is accessible to its people and a nation with room to grow. “To change a wilderness into a city, to erect beautiful buildings...to that degree of perfection necessary to receive the seat of government of so extensive an empire” – that is how Pierre L’Enfant described his vision for Washington.

Daniel Burnham quoted: “Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men’s blood. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die”. Washington is a symbolic city where the values of our great nation are placed on public display echoing Mr. Burnham’s ideas. It is a representation of the themes of our time – to respect the environment and provide mobility, diversity, and opportunity. I believe that this is a City which contains the core ingredients that make Americans proud and joyful, and provides a compelling vision of what a nation’s capital should be – the way Pierre L’Enfant imagined a city that was not just put on paper but represented a noble diagram of our democracy.