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The Commissioner • A Publication of the American Planning Association • Fall 2010

Ten Habits of a Good Planning Commissioner

N.J. Pete Pointner, FAICP Plan commissioners are lay persons, knowledgeable in their area of work and in many aspects of community life. Most do not have formal training in planning, but certain professions provide expertise valuable to the role of a plan commissioner, including engineering, landscape design, architecture, real estate, and retail business. *continued on page 2*

An effective planning commission or board chair not only knows the rules of order but understands the extent and limits of the board's authority.

Joe Saurzewski for APA

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Commissioners, in most cases, are appointed by elected officials and are therefore somewhat removed from the political pressures encountered by elected representatives. Based upon my experience working with planning commissions as both a municipal planner and a consultant, I offer these 10 habits of an effective planning commissioner or member of a zoning board of appeals.

Good commissioners and board members:

1. Know their role

- They recognize that they are to carry out due diligence on review of plan ning and development issues for the community and its elected officials. They accept that they are most often a recommending body and the elected officials are the decision makers.
- They are familiar with their responsibilities as described in their state's statutes and the enabling ordinances of their own community. They also understand areas of review that are reserved for the elected officials, such as funding incentives and impact fees.

Joe Szurszewski for APA

While not every commission meeting provokes smiles, a meeting that adheres to fair procedures and proper standards goes a long way to building trust and respect for planning.

2. Understand Robert's Rules

- They are prepared to make a motion properly and to offer comments relevant to the agenda, procedures, and applicable standards.
- They respect the chair and the public meeting process. They offer comments based on objective criteria and do not engage in personal disagreement with a petitioner, a staff member, an audience member, or a fellow commissioner.

3. Understand their authority and its limits

- They understand that comments and decisions are based on the record and the legal foundation for the commission and its work. They understand that arbitrary or capricious comments or demands have an impact. In extreme cases, this capriciousness can drive away good developers and sully the image of the community.
- They understand that suggested contributions or actions must comply with adopted plans, policies, ordinances, or standards, and not constitute a new standard.

4. Know the comprehensive plan

- They have read the plan and considered its policies, goals, and objectives and the rationale behind the land-use recommendations. They understand that it articulates goals rather than serving as a regulatory document.
- They work with their fellow commissioners to recommend changes to keep the plan current and relevant to their community and its vision of the future.

5. Understand zoning

- They know what criteria are appropriate to each agenda item brought to the commission.
- If they are in doubt about concepts, criteria, and legal foundations, they turn to the appropriate staff for explanation or seek training.
- They understand planning and zoning terms and how they apply: permitted versus special use; variation versus deviation; lot coverage ratio versus floor area ratio; gross versus net density; buffer yard; setbacks; etc.

6. Visit the site or area under discussion

- They take notes on issues to consider during deliberations on such things as the topography and drainage of the site and environs; existing trees or natural features; character of the surrounding neighborhood; adjacent land uses, setbacks, and notable vegetation; adjacent roadways, traffic, and points of access and egress; existing buildings or signs of prior human use; land-use patterns in the area; and public facilities or areas that warrant pedestrian or bicycle connections or consideration such as schools, parks, and shopping areas.
- Making certain they follow the procedures established for their community, they may encourage a petitioner to meet with nearby property owners or residents and talk to those they meet on their field review to identify any legitimate issues or concerns to be addressed at a public hearing.

7. Know how to use staff and consultants

- They support staff and set a standard of respect for all people engaged in the planning process.
- They expect thorough staff reports on each action brought to them for a recommendation.
- They expect staff and consultants to document the connections between the details of a particular project and all relevant ordinance criteria. They expect reports to note the degree of difference between proposed and required standards.

8. Work as part of a team

- Experienced commissioners may develop a "specialty" so that the other commissioners can count on them to lead the questioning in a particular area such as landscaping, traffic, stormwater, etc.
- They use their meeting time wisely. For example, they may voice support for a position or comment of another commissioner but do not repeat the same comments unless they are suggesting qualifications or modifications.

9. Are objective in their recommendations

- They listen to the public.
- In circumstances where legitimate concerns have been raised by adjacent property owners, they try to get a developer to mitigate impacts where possible.
- They are respectful of, but not intimated by, the public.
- They create solid findings of fact and refer to the relevant ordinance criteria as a basis for their comments and recommendations.

10. Evaluate the consequences of their decisions and their decision-making process

- They assess whether the process was fair and met proper standards.
- They consider the outcome of the decision. For example, they will visit completed projects or areas subject to planning commission recommendations. They will consider whether the result was what they intended.
- They work with the chair and staff to recommend changes to standards or procedures to produce successful projects and to avoid problems.

Nonconforming Uses: Part One

Deborah M. Rosenthal, AICP

Nonconforming uses, the natural by-products of zoning, are created when zoning rules change over time and the old uses are grandfathered in under the original approvals.

How the grandfathered uses are treated, how long they survive, and how much they are allowed to change are all decided, in the first instance, by the planning commission. This article and part two (coming in Winter 2011) discusses the governing rules.

Know the Basics

The goal of most nonconforming use ordinances is to prevent expansion and encourage eventual termination of the use while, at the same time, protecting investments made in reliance on the original zoning. Nonconformities come in two types: activities on the property and the physical condition of the lot or structures. Both are referred to as nonconforming uses; the rules governing the two types often differ, and they pose different planning problems.

A nonconforming use is not listed as permitted in the applicable zone under the local zoning ordinance. A nonconforming lot or structure fails to meet one or more of the design requirements of the ordinance, such as setbacks, height, access, parking, width, and depth. The types may be combined when, for instance, a nonconforming industrial building is only suitable for industrial use in a newly created commercial zone. In contrast, the nonconformity may be as minor as a 4.5-foot side yard where five feet is required. To qualify as a legal nonconforming use, the use must have been legal when established. If it was not lawful at inception, it remains illegal, regardless of longevity and extent of agency knowledge.

Know Your Ordinance

The fate of nonconforming uses is controlled by the precise language of the local ordinance with, in some states, an overlay of state law. Two neighboring cities, identical in most respects, may have very different ordinances. For example, some cities allow moderate expansion of nonconforming uses; others prohibit it. Application of a nonconforming use ordinance depends on its specific language, even if interpretation is challenging. It is crucial that these ordinances be clearly drafted to express the public agency's intent, and be fully understood by administrators and officials.

Creation of Nonconforming Uses

Nonconformities are created when a new zoning ordinance is adopted that disallows the existing activity or structure in a given zone. The use is then considered legal if it met the relevant local zoning criteria when it was built or if it commenced before the first zoning ordinance was adopted. Some ordinances also require that the use met other legal requirements when it was established, such as state law or business licensing. A use not legally allowed on the date of the zone change, or that starts afterward, is an illegal nonconforming use. Such uses can be abated and are not subject to the special rules discussed here.

Nonconforming uses always involve either the use or physical configuration of the land or structure, and arise in unlimited variety, ranging from lot sizes to the details of sophisticated business operations. The extent of potential nonconformity is as broad as the scope of the zoning. Every inconsistency with the ordinance can be considered a nonconformity. As zoning ordinances and uses become more complex, so does the law.

Abandonment

Most ordinances provide that the right to continue a nonconforming activity terminates if it ceases for a period of time. The abandonment time varies widely. Instead of or in addition to a time period, some ordinances look at whether the owner intended to cease nonconforming operations.

Once the right to continue a nonconforming use is abandoned through nonuse, legal status cannot be regarded by resuming the use, regardless of how long the use then continues. Nonuse typically is not considered abandonment if the owner is prevented from using the property by operation of law, such as a lawsuit, or if he is actively trying to resume the use. Nonconforming buildings generally do not lose status unless the offending portion of the structure is demolished. Rarely do local ordinances require demolition due to abandonment unless the building is a vacant nuisance.

Expansion and Reconstruction

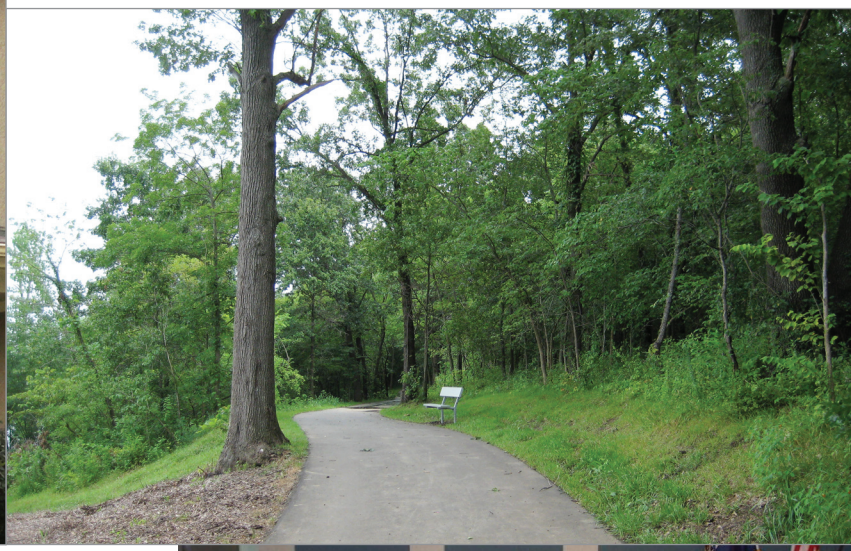
Expansion of nonconforming uses is another common issue. Decisions are controlled by the language of the ordinance. Ordinances usually establish a percentage by which the structure can be expanded; 15 percent is typical provided that the nonconformity is not thereby increased. Expansion, therefore, cannot decrease an already inadequate setback. However, square footage can be increased within the current allowed zoning envelope.

Questions may arise when a lawful second story is proposed on a nonconforming footprint. Usually the addition needs to be set back to current standards, or is prohibited. Cities can elect to allow a new structure if a troublesome nonconformity is terminated or mitigated as a result. Most ordinances allow maintenance but not full replacement. Some of these situations can be handled with variances, as will be discussed in part two in the next issue.

More challenging is the decision whether new activities constitute prohibited expansion of an existing nonconforming use. Example: an owner applies for a business license or building permit and is rejected on zoning grounds. Nonconforming use ordinances are not intended to freeze uses at a point in time, and the "natural development" of a business is allowed. New products can be sold, new equipment installed, and interiors updated.

The difference between "natural development" and "expansion" is not always clear. For example, many buildings now have ground-floor coffee shops, regarded as standard amenities. In a different context, mining may only affect a small portion of the property at a time, but eventually affect the entire parcel. Whether these types of use are allowed depends on the ordinance's language, local custom, and, sometimes, state law. Be prepared with substantial evidence to justify your decision. Remember that allowing uses to change is often essential to the financial health of the nonconforming use but can be equally aggravating to neighbors.

Blue Springs, Missouri,
Planning Commission



Photos courtesy Community Development Department, City of Blue Springs

Karen Finucan Clarkson

Pictured here are the members of the Blue Springs Planning Commission: (left to right): Ken Billups, Jr.; Travis Graham; James May; Chris Henning; Mark Trosen; Susan Culpepper (Chair); Michael Parker (Vice Chair); Joe Haney; Keith Sullivan; Lynn Banks; George Abbott (not pictured).

"We want community involvement. It's important for people here to understand why decisions are made and to have a voice in what's happening," says Susan Culpepper, chair of the planning commission in Blue Springs, Missouri.

To that end, on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month, planning commission meeting are streamed live online. The material is later archived and made available as a webcast.

"What's great about that is we can reach out and see how many people are watching," says Kim Nakahodo, the city's public information officer. "It gives us a measurable matrix. If viewership is up, it could be that something is a hot topic."

The 11-member planning commission serves primarily in an advisory capacity but does make final determinations on issues such as design review, the comprehensive plan, and preliminary plat review. Nominated by the mayor and approved by the city council, planning commission members may serve an unlimited number of four-year terms.

Commissioners receive agendas, applications, staff reports, and other information the Wednesday before the meeting. "That gives me enough time to do my homework, to visit sites and to listen to the community and neighbors about projects adjacent to them," says Michael Parker, the commission's vice chair.

The planning commission stays on top of issues and trends. "When they see potentially controversial projects that repeat themselves, they view it as an opportunity to review and possibly revise the code," says Scott Allen, the community development director. "They take it upon themselves to make recommendations to council. Recently we revised our sign code after an appeal."

Planning commissioners are volunteers. The panel currently includes, among other professions, an engineer, builder, accountant, real estate agent, and a county planner. "It's always nice to have a range of expertise," says Culpepper. "That way if we have a question about an engineering issue, for example, there's someone who can help walk us through the pros and cons."

Parks & Recreation Department, City of Blue Springs

(Top, left to right): Using the city's award-winning Downtown Development Code, a form-based zoning code, several newly constructed single-family detached row homes enhance a redeveloped neighborhood in Blue Springs; Blue Springs' latest public recreational trail, located in the new Gregory O. Grounds Park, was christened in this summer; dedicated in 2006, Blue Spring, *by world-renowned artist Brower Hatcher, is a signature piece of Blue Springs' dedication to public art throughout the community.*

To encourage communication, the planning commission has, for the past several years, cohosted an annual workshop for developers. "We bring new codes and new projects to their attention," says Allen, "and we do a Q&A as well." The most recent session, in February, included a presentation of economic and community development trends, an overview of brownfield development opportunities, and an update of proposed projects as well as those under way.

While Blue Springs is not without its controversial issues, Culpepper believes the community is committed to a high quality of life and recognizes that planning is a tool to achieve that. "We all talk to each other and work together to do quality development in Blue Springs," she says.

Issues in Blue Springs

After years of sometimes intense community discussion, the City of Blue Springs developed a vision for its downtown. To help achieve its goals, the planning commission approved "a form-based code, which is new for us," says Susan Culpepper. An alternative to conventional zoning, a form-based code uses physical form, rather than separation of uses, as its organizing principle.

Despite the national economic slowdown, a number of major development projects are under way in this community of 62,000 situated 20 miles east of Kansas City, Missouri. "Adams Dairy Landing is a 500,000-square-foot development along our premier corridor," says Michael Parker. "It's been a big boon for the city, sitting as it does on the eastern edge of the Kansas City metro area."

The Missouri Innovation Park, currently under development, will be a more than 250-acre science and technology hub for knowledge-based innovation and commercialization. "The focus of Innovation Park is combining like sciences and like companies to create a synergy," says Culpepper.

When completely built out, the park will feature 1.74-million square feet of space and provide some 5,900 jobs. "It includes the University of Missouri School of Information Science and Learning Technologies, Food and Nutrition program, and College of Veterinary Medicine," he says. The university opened its Mizzou Center in May, two years ahead of schedule.

As the commission increasingly focuses on issues of sustainability, it amended its unified development code to allow wind turbines in industrial areas. "We had someone developing offices and warehouses in a light industrial zone who was interested in utilizing micro wind turbines for powering outhousing areas," says Scott Allen, the city's community development director. After consulting with in-house and other legal experts, "we felt it was something we could weave into our current code while protecting the health and safety of neighboring residents."

As Blue Springs' population increased over the years—growing from about 6,800 residents in 1970 to over 62,000 now—the design of multifamily structures slowly became a topic of concern, especially among architects who occasionally found themselves back at the drawing board. The city's multifamily design task force, chaired by Parker, crafted standards that respect the character of the surrounding residential area by encouraging architectural features that establish a blend of styles and prevent extremes. "Our planning commission has set the bar high," says Allen, noting that quality development is embraced by both citizens and developers alike.

Digital Coast Shapes Planning

Kitty Fahey

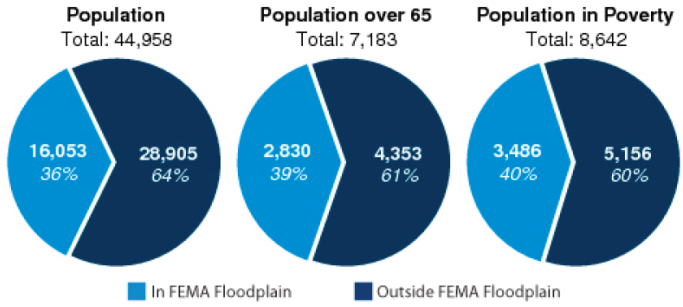
Miami-Dade County borders two national parks, is located at sea level, and has a population larger than 17 states. Speaking last June at a meeting of the White House's Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force, Mayor Carlos Alvarez observed that "with these gifts come responsibility." These factors have led area leaders to vigorously address complex coastal issues.

"An important partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and its Digital Coast initiative is emerging," said Alvarez. "For Miami-Dade County, this partnership is bringing technical assistance and training to help support our climate adaptation planning."

The online resource Digital Coast (www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast) is not just proving helpful for Miami-Dade, but for U.S. coastal communities large and small that are wrestling with similar challenges—an unprecedented rise in population and development combined with an urgency to safeguard natural resources, prepare for intensified storms and other hazards, and adapt to climate change impacts such as sea level rise.

Digital Coast hosts free data along with the training and tools needed to turn the data into useful information. It also includes examples of Digital Coast in action, so coastal communities and groups can learn from one another. In fact, this online resource was developed in part to unify the efforts of coastal groups that might not otherwise work together—officials at all scales of government, planners and planning commissioners, community stakeholders, and those in the nonprofit, private, and academic arenas.

The American Planning Association is the latest partner to join the Digital Coast effort, which was launched in 2008 and is led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center. The Center either developed or supported the resources on the site in close collaboration with its partners and other agencies and organizations. The five other Digital Coast partners are the Coastal States Organization, the Association of State Floodplain Managers, the National Association of Counties, the National States Geographic Information Council, and The Nature Conservancy. This partnership is supported by the Center and the Mississippi Coordinating Council for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Systems.



County Snapshots:

Beaufort County, North Carolina

People + Floodplains = Not Good
High-Risk Populations + Floodplains = Even Worse

Based on 2000 U.S. Census records.

The pie charts show high-risk population statistics for Beaufort County, North Carolina, obtained by using the Coastal County Snapshots tool at *www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots/*. The more homes and people located in a floodplain, the greater the potential for harm from flooding.

NOAA

FEMA, Jocelyn Augustino

Individuals with a role in community planning can help combat the damaging impacts of flooding and inundation with the Coastal Inundation Toolkit.

"APA is excited about being a Digital Coast partner," says Jim Schwab, AICP, manager of APA's Hazards Planning Research Center. "Planning commissioners in coastal areas often have to get up to speed very quickly on local developments and plans. Digital Coast gives them access to the data and information they need to be well informed on the coastal issues that confront them."

Digital Coast's data, tools, and training can be especially useful to coastal planning commissioners, officials, and technical personnel seeking to foster hazard resilience, climate change adaptation, and natural resource conservation.

Increasing Community Resilience to Hazards

Flooding, storm surge, hurricanes, coastal erosion—a community's ability to bounce back from these and other hazards is key to its health and sustainability. Several Digital Coast tools provide easy, accessible ways for planning commissioners to strengthen hazard resilience in their communities.

Historical Hurricane Tracks (www.csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes) features Atlantic Basin hurricane data going back to 1851 and nearly 60 years of Eastern North Pacific Ocean data. The mapped "tracks" of every hurricane are easy to locate using basic search criteria such as county name, zip code, or year. What's more, planning personnel familiar with geographic information system applications can download and map data to develop hurricane-impact scenarios and evaluate evacuation and resilience options. The tool was developed by the NOAA Coastal Services Center in partnership with the National Hurricane Center.

Another tool, Coastal County Snapshots (www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots) allows users to gain an instant picture of local hazards information and:

- Locate important facts about exposure to flooding, including the number of critical facilities and percentage of vulnerable populations (such as seniors and those in poverty) within the flood zone
- Compare hazard risk statistics of counties
- Learn to conduct risk assessments for hazards and climate change
- Discover practical steps to become more resilient

"It's very important to know the local points of vulnerability when a disaster threat involves water," says Schwab. "Demographics matter, vulnerable populations matter, and that's why this tool is so helpful. It gets people to ask and answer important questions about hazards, like 'How easy will it be to get this vulnerable population out of the floodplain before the storm?' or 'Should we permit the construction of a senior care facility in an area vulnerable to floods?'"

Putting Hazards Information to Good Use

Commissioners using Coastal County Snapshots may find they want to deepen their knowledge of local risks for inundation, an event in which normally dry land is covered by water. The Coastal Inundation Toolkit (www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/inundation) was created by the Digital Coast Partnership. It enables users to address a wide range of informational and technical needs to:

- Understand essential information about coastal inundation
- Identify any coastal county's exposure to inundation
- Map inundation to illustrate potential impacts
- Assess community risks, vulnerabilities, and resilience
- Communicate risk strategies to initiate change
- Discover how other communities are addressing inundation

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Allison Hardin, a planner for the city of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and a participant in Digital Coast tool development, is an enthusiastic supporter of the toolkit. "Anyone in a coastal planning role needs to be worried about inundation, because we don't have a lot of storage space for water in low-lying coastal communities, and development increases our hazard risks," she says. "The toolkit is great because it explains in plain language how communities can help make areas safer and more resistant to floods. It also has hot links to inundation terms and concepts that commissioners might not know." Technical planning staff members can use the toolkit's *Coastal Inundation Mapping Guidebook* or augment their skills by taking the Coastal Inundation Mapping course.

Where can individuals with a role in planning go to get the adaptation information they need? The Coastal Climate Adaptation website (http://collaborate.csc.noaa.gov/climateadaptation) is a good place to start. It provides access to hundreds of publications, resources, and local examples, including:

- Adaptation and action plans
- Case studies and strategies
- Guidance on climate science and on communicating this information
- Guidebooks
- Outreach materials
- Training and workshop materials

NOAA

CanVis enables viewers to visualize the scenic impact of sea level rise and other coastal changes. The untouched image on top shows the historic Battery in Charleston, South Carolina, while the CanVis visualization below shows projected sea level rise.

Coastal communities using the Hazard Education and Awareness Tool (HEAT) template are able to deliver time-sensitive information to the public about coastal hazards, evacuation, and sheltering (www.csc.noaa.gov/psc/riskmgmt/HEAT.html). Its user-friendly application can be customized by any organization with access to hazards data, a web server, and personnel with basic technical skills. The Tsunami Evacuation Zone Mapping Tool, a component of Hawaii's HEAT template, proved critically important last February for thousands of Hawaii residents during a tsunami warning and evacuation. Oregon and Washington are also using the HEAT template.

Enhancing Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts

A rising tide of respected climate scientists and coastal experts agree—now is the time to craft plans that will enable coastal communities to adapt and thrive despite sea level rise, intensified storms and floods, and other impacts associated with climate change.

Putting Adaptation Information to Good Use

Simulated visual images can be much more effective than charts and graphs in drawing an audience's attention to coastal-related issues, including those related to climate change. Knowing this, the NOAA Coastal Services Center partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agroforestry Center to provide CanVis—a free software visualization tool (www.csc.noaa.gov/canvis).

With CanVis, personal digital photos or images provide the backdrop, and an image library of over 700 items contains objects that can be added, including water, docks, wind turbines, and seawalls.

"It can be very difficult for people to wrap their heads around the facts when you talk in abstract terms about a projected sea level rise of six inches," says Schwab. "But if you show a CanVis simulation of that projection, with water levels creeping up the foundation of a local building, it makes the whole issue more real and urgent."

Resource managers in Washington State's Puget Sound region have used CanVis to simulate future sea level rise, picture the height of existing seawalls, and digitally "add" hypothetical seawalls. In other cases, coastal stakeholders and officials have created CanVis illustrations to "see" the visual impact of offshore wind-energy turbines on local ocean and beach areas. Free web-based CanVis training is regularly available (see www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/canvis/training.html).

Road Map for Adapting to Coastal Risk (www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/coastalrisk.html), a web-based training program, assists communities in characterizing their exposure to current and future hazard and climate threats. Participants also consider ways in which plans and policies already on the books can address community hazard vulnerabilities and jump-start adaptation strategies.

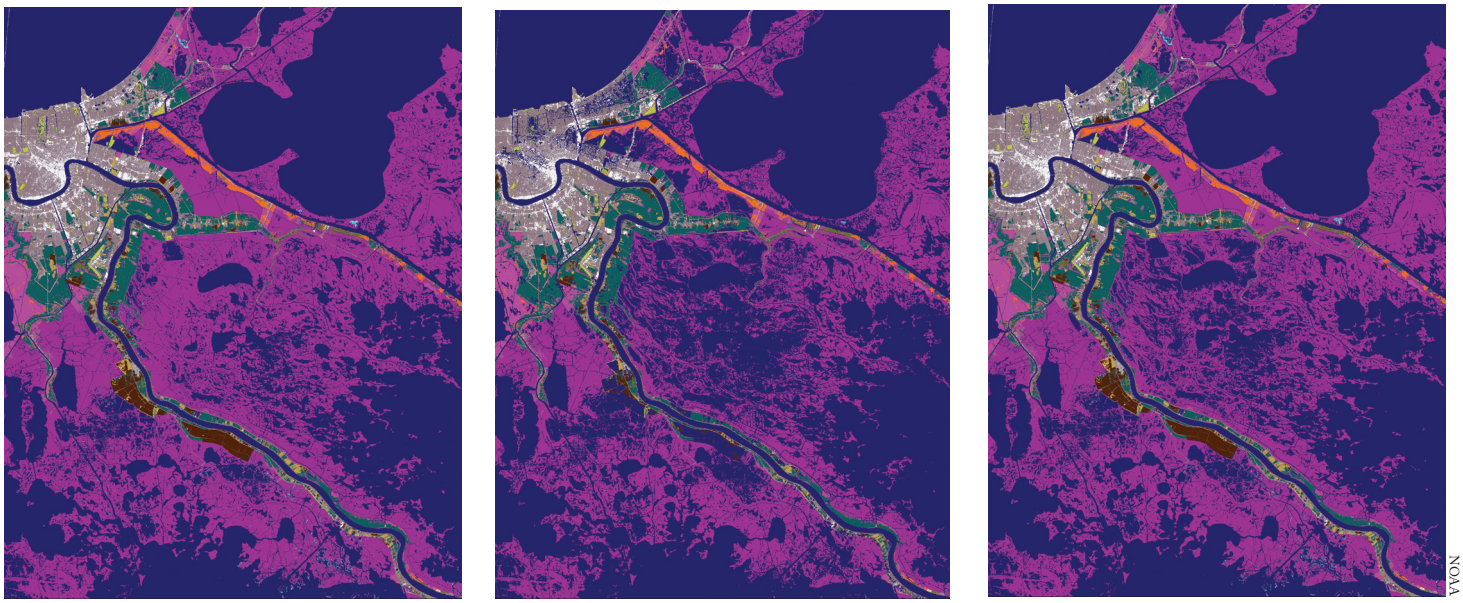
The first participants to pilot the training were officials and residents of Chatham County, Georgia. The workshop brought together a wide array of planners, government officials at all levels, and community stakeholders.

For example, lands with little or no development are often capable of storing more stormwater, thereby lessening storm and flood damage. In similar fashion, preserving strategic coastal wetlands can lessen an area's hurricane damage while sustaining the local fishing industry, the creatures they harvest, and the marine habitat.

Introducing Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience (www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/green.html) trains participants to recognize the many benefits of safeguarding strategic natural resources. Attendees learn green infrastructure terms and concepts, consider how stakeholders can implement green infrastructure plans, and identify new or existing local processes for preserving green infrastructure.

Putting Natural Resources Information to Good Use

Data and imagery of land cover and land cover change can help commissioners and others get the information they need to make important planning and permitting decisions. Digital Coast features this information via the Coastal Change Analysis Program (C-CAP) at www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/data/ccapregional.



NOAA

Coastal county data are accessible through the Digital Coast website. These land cover images (left to right) show Louisiana's Breton Sound before, during, and weeks after Hurricane Katrina. The flooding—and significant loss—of wetlands (shown in magenta) is evident.

"I was very excited to see a diverse group of folks together at the table talking that typically don't work together and who didn't realize that their plans and regulations could affect things like shallow coastal flooding and sea level rise," says Jackie Jackson Teel, a natural resources administrator for Chatham County–Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission. The training also helped Chatham County's planning commission identify both existing and proposed projects that could enhance adaptation—for instance, through increased buffer protections for wetlands, better community outreach, and the development of local scenarios for sea level rise.

Conserving Natural Resources

Conserving strategically important coastal lands and resources is not just important for quality of life. Such "green infrastructure" preserves natural resources while also fortifying hazard resilience and adaptation to climate change.

C-CAP produces a nationally standardized database of land cover and land change information for U.S. coastal regions. C-CAP products provide inventories of intertidal areas, wetlands, and adjacent uplands. The land cover maps are updated every five years so that changes or trends can be detected.

Organizations and agencies have used C-CAP data and imagery, either alone or with other tools, to measure coastal erosion and stormwater runoff; calculate the percentage of impervious surfaces, such as sidewalks and roads, in flood-prone areas; and to analyze wetland and soil characteristics to aid in establishing habitat-conservation priorities.

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The Habitat Priority Planner (www.csc.noaa.gov/hpp) uses C-CAP and other data to help communities to:

- Inventory specific habitat or land-use types
- Assess target habitat or land-use type conditions
- Analyze "what-if" scenarios, such as the impact of new development or how restoration might change overall habitat function
- Create maps, reports, and data tables to enhance communication and the decision-making process

Residents of Edisto Island, South Carolina, used the Habitat Priority Planner to incorporate photos and information into the island map. By doing so, the community made a successful bid to get a local roadway designated as a National Scenic Byway. In addition, visualizations generated by the Habitat Priority Planner helped local conservation organizations "see" and document gaps in its conservation and data coverage. Having identified these gaps, the organizations collected extra geospatial data depicting scenic, historical, and natural resources. The added information will bolster future applications for conservation-related funding.

Information on Habitat Priority Planner training can be found on the Digital Coast site. The tool is easy for groups to use, because it requires just one person who has intermediate experience with ArcGIS software.

The Way Forward

Jim Schwab believes that APA's involvement with Digital Coast will yield benefits now and in the future. Coastal APA members are expected to play an important role in enhancing Digital Coast by providing feedback and information that will increase its benefits for the planning community.

"The beauty of APA's new partnership role in Digital Coast is that it will help everyone involved," says Schwab. He notes that with feedback from the planning community, "future Digital Coast offerings will do an even better job of drilling down to a level that is relevant to local planning and permitting decisions. That's clearly a win-win situation for everyone."

Planning and Resource Protection in Coastal Areas

APA Publications

Delta Urbanism: The Netherlands
Han Meyer
APA Planners Press, 2010

Delta Urbanism: New Orleans
Richard Campanella
APA Planners Press, 2010

Awash in Needs: The Costs of Beach Nourishment Hit a Trio of Tiny Beach Towns
Carole Moore
Planning, July 2009

Our Imperiled Oceans and Coasts: How to Tackle the Biggest Cleanup Job of All
Jeff Herlitz
Planning, August/September 2008

Winds of Change
Jim Schwab, AICP
Planning, October 2009

Local Zoning and Water Rights
Scott L. Reichle
Zoning Practice, August 2009

After *Nollan*: *Dolan v. City of Tigard*
David L. Callies, FAICP
Land Use Law and Zoning Digest,
February 1994

***Nollan* Meets *Dolan* Rollin' Down the Bike Path**
Michael M. Berger
Land Use Law and Zoning Digest,
February 1994

***Nollan, Lucas,* and *Dolan:* Respecting Expectations**
Eric Damian Kelly, FAICP
Land Use Law and Zoning Digest,
February 1994

Stop the Beach Renourishment, Inc. v. Fla. Dep't of Envt'l Prot.
U.S. 2010 [highest court], Decided June 17, 2010, 130 S.Ct. 2592
Abstracted in 62 PEL 334
Planning & Environmental Law, Vol. 62, No. 9, September 2010

Restoration of beaches, so that private land no longer touches the water, does not constitute a taking

Stop the Beach Renourishment—Six Perspectives
John D. Echeverria, Steven J. Eagle, Harvey M. Jacobs, Daniel W. Bromley, John J. Delaney, and Brian W. Blesser
Planning & Environmental Law, Vol. 62, No. 9, September 2010

Web Resources

Coastal Zone Management Act
http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/czm/czm_act.html

Passed in 1972, the Coastal Zone Management Act is administered by NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. The act provides for management of the nation's coastal resources, including the Great Lakes, and balances economic development with environmental conservation. As NOAA describes the intent of the act: "The 34 coastal programs aim to balance competing land and water issues in the coastal zone, while estuarine reserves serve as field laboratories to provide a greater understanding of estuaries and how humans impact them. The overall program objectives of CZMA remain balanced to 'preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, to restore or enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone.'"

NOAA Digital Coast
www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast

NOAA Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov

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Affirming Value

Joe Szurszewski for APA

W. Shedrick Coleman
Chair, Chatham County-Savannah (Georgia) Metropolitan Planning Commission

In the current economic climate, planning boards and commissions are finding themselves devalued by the elected officials they serve. Across the nation, communities are faced with major funding shortages and seek avenues to reduce costs. Planning boards are a ripe target for such reductions because their value is often misunderstood by the public.

The implementation of most planning projects usually extends for a number of years, thereby diminishing their perceived impact. Elected officials are faced with moving projects forward that they believe strengthen their tenure in office. Long-range projects suffer in this environment and the work of the planning board usually falls within this light.

It is important that planning boards reaffirm their value. One strategy is to leverage media opportunities to make the public aware of the projects implemented by the planning board as they are realized. Regular public announcements of achieved milestones can keep the public engaged and offer the opportunity to tout the role the board plays in moving the community forward.

These milestone events also serve as opportunities for elected officials to connect with the efforts of the planning board in a synergistic manner. Additionally, elected officials must acknowledge the involvement of the public and their expectation of positive results from the planning board relative to healthy growth within the community.

A second path is to use reduced development periods as an opportunity to evaluate the success of prior developments. What most communities will find is a mixed bag where the intended (stated) goals have failed to materialize. Getting ahead of the next wave of development in a manner that responds to the current and future needs of the community should be promoted as an act of a forward-thinking elected leadership body.

Now is not the time to reduce experienced planning staff and defer effective planning. Effective planning is not a reactive process, the results of which we will continually find wanting. Now is the time to use our planning resources proactively to build better communities. We cannot afford to spend funds on showcase projects that do nothing to meet the need for long-term community viability. Resources are clearly finite and the public is now demanding more accountability from the leadership of our communities to solve issues directly related to their way of life.

We must recognize communities are living entities where infrastructure links the various component parts, just as the circulatory and nervous systems link our organs. To keep us healthy, planning is preventive medicine.

The City Social Movement

At the founding of American city planning in 1909 were two women who brought balance to the physical design-oriented movement by putting the concern for neighborhoods, housing, and health on the agenda. Florence Kelley and Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch learned about health conditions in inner-city tenements from their firsthand experience in settlement houses and through studies of European social planning.

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Simkhovitch and Kelley helped organize the first National Conference on City Planning, held in Washington, D.C., in May 1909. Simkhovitch—the only woman to speak—addressed the problem of housing congestion "due to unregulated concentration and social neglect" and the need for adequate social services for women and children. Both women saw settlement houses as vehicles for organizing at the neighborhood level, serving as centers for the delivery of social services. Neighborhood-level planning, they believed, allowed for local community involvement that was crucial to sound planning.

They helped lay the foundation for the conference with an exhibit on congestion with the theme "Every city needs a city plan now." While the women helped create the City Social Movement in planning, their work became even more influential in the emerging housing profession. Simkhovitch helped found the National Housing Association, which began holding its own conferences, separate from planning, in 1911.

Read more in Susan Marie Wirka's "The City Social Movement: Progressive Women Reformers and Early Social Planning" in *Planning the Twentieth-Century City*, 1996. (eds. Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver).

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