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Federal Planning Funding Jason Jordan One of the signature achievements of the Obama administration's first months in office was the establishment of a formal interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities formed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency. President Obama further affirmed his administration's focus on livable communities by establishing an Office of Urban Affairs in the White House and appointing an urban policy advisor to the Domestic Policy Council.

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The coordination of federal programs to promote sustainability can help in the development of complex, transit-oriented plans. The goal is to create places similar to this mixed use development around a revitalized transit station in southwest Washington, D.C.



Carolyn Temma

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These efforts were designed to get federal agencies whose programs have a direct impact on local and regional planning working together. Appearing before a congressional committee together, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, and EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson pledged to focus on reforms that would promote integrated policies and planning for housing, transportation, environmental protection, and community development. Their joint appearance on Capitol Hill last June marked the first time ever that the leaders of HUD, DOT, and EPA had testified together.



New federal initiatives focus on low-income housing integrated into existing neighborhoods, modeled in part on examples such as this one in Santa Rosa, California.

As an initial step, the three agencies developed “Livability Principles” to guide their work and better define the administration’s priorities for promoting sustainability. The six principles are:

- ▲ Provide more transportation choices
- ▲ Promote equitable, affordable housing
- ▲ Enhance economic competitiveness
- ▲ Support existing communities
- ▲ Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
- ▲ Value communities and neighborhoods

The partnership agencies, along with leaders from the White House Office of Urban Affairs, launched a “listening tour” aimed at visiting communities to identify both key needs and existing best practices. This work also spurred an evaluation of federal regulatory barriers that inhibit integrated planning and smarter growth.

How are better coordinated planning programs achieved? As one example, HUD, DOT, and EPA agreed to joint review of grant applications for new programs, such as the \$1.5 billion Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) multimodal grants established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and of existing efforts like EPA’s smart growth technical assistance grants. HUD and DOT also proposed a pilot

effort to allow coordination of HUD’s Community Development Block Grants with DOT’s formula funding for transportation projects. These funding streams had previously been subject to conflicting requirements over targeting resources based on economic need.

Among the most significant planning policy actions taken by the administration was the creation of the Sustainable Communities Initiative at HUD. In its FY 2010 request to Congress, HUD asked for \$150 million for sustainability planning grants and plan implementation “challenge grants.” HUD also established a new Office of Sustainable Communities and Housing to oversee the grants and coordinate with partner agencies.

Congress approved the initial \$150 million and the program is being launched this summer. According to HUD officials, grant applications will be accepted this summer with award announcements slated for sometime in August. (As of this writing, the final Notice of Funding Availability has not been released. Updated information on the application process is provided online at www.planning.org/policy).

Based on HUD’s preliminary notice, the first round of funding would be available in three categories: regional plans for sustainable development, execution plans and programs, and implementation incentives. Funding would also be set aside for smaller regions and rural areas. HUD has recently released proposed rating factor criteria for evaluating grant proposals. The factors are capacity and experience, need and extent of the problem, ability to leverage resources and partnerships, and likelihood of achieving results.

The new sustainability grants mark the first time in a generation that significant federal resources have targeted local and regional planning. Some in Congress want to ensure that the initiative is in place for years to come. The Livable Communities Act (S. 1619/H.R. 4690) would formally establish the new HUD sustainability office and create a new federal interagency council on sustainable communities. The legislation, introduced by Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Colo.) is pending on Capitol Hill.

DOT also took quick steps to advance the goals of the partnership. Livability principles were used in reviewing applications for the TIGER grants. The Federal Transit Administration moved to make changes to the New Starts process, redirected funding into livability-focused grants for streetcars, urban circulator projects, and buses, and supported research on planning for transit-oriented development and affordable housing. DOT received \$600 million for a second round of TIGER grants, which includes up to \$35 million for planning. DOT plans to coordinate the \$35 million in TIGER II planning funding with HUD’s \$40 million in sustainability challenge grants. Secretary LaHood has also issued new policy guidance on biking and pedestrian access.

As an example of the benefits of coordinated funding, administration officials have highlighted Detroit. In the first round of DOT’s TIGER grant program under the Recovery Act, DOT awarded \$25 million for the Woodward Avenue streetcar project in that city. HUD, DOT, and EPA jointly reviewed the city’s application; HUD brought to DOT’s attention community development activities already planned or under way in the Woodward Avenue corridor, which made the site a more attractive investment for DOT. The EPA was able to highlight brownfield remediation efforts in the vicinity of

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Fundamentals of Conditional Uses

V. Gail Easley, FAICP



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A conditional use is a specific use or activity that is not permitted “by right” in a zoning district, but that may be permissible where additional standards are met to ensure compatibility with other uses and the district.

“By right” means that a use is identified in advance in the zoning district as a permitted use, subject to the standards that apply to all uses in the district. Conditional uses, also called special uses or special exceptions, are included in the zoning regulations for several reasons:

▲ The use is not typical for the categories of uses associated with the zoning district. For example, an industrial district is expected to have a range of manufacturing, assembly, warehousing, and distribution uses. However, a child care facility or restaurant may be allowed as a conditional use in the district.

▲ There is an expectation that the use may have impacts beyond those impacts anticipated for the zoning district. For example, a residential district may include public uses, such as schools or libraries, with different traffic levels than residential uses.

▲ The local government is unable to fully anticipate the impacts that may be associated with the use. A church, for example, may primarily have Sunday services; however, other activities, such as midweek services, a day care center, a school, recreation facilities, or any number of social as well as religious activities may occur every day of the week. It is often not possible to anticipate the type, intensity, and impact of such activities. In a conditional use review, activities are defined, impacts identified, and conditions set to ensure compatibility with the neighborhood.

▲ The use may be desirable within the district, but requires additional development standards in order to ensure compatibility. For example, it is often desirable to have public uses, such as schools, libraries, day care centers, or fire stations near residential areas to provide adequate service to nearby residents. However, appropriate standards for traffic flow, parking, hours of operation, and other features may differ considerably from the standards associated with the principal residential uses.

A conditional use requires additional standards to ensure that the use:

▲ will be compatible or in harmony with the area in which it is located;

▲ will not endanger public health or safety;

▲ is appropriate in the specific location where it is proposed; and

▲ is designed in such a way as to mitigate potential conflicts with adjacent and nearby uses in the surrounding area.

The reasons for conditions are centered on the concept of compatibility, location, and mitigation of conflicts or negative impacts. Over the years planners have tried to agree on the definition and concepts of compatibility. Simply stated, compatibility means the degree to which a project fits in with its surrounding neighborhood. The factors to be considered may be put into three general groups: (1) the relationship between proposed uses

and adjacent and nearby buildings and uses; (2) the degree of negative impacts from proposed uses to surrounding uses; and (3) harmony among the uses of the area.

Consider standards to address these conditions:

Building size, meaning the height, bulk, and dimensions of a proposed building. Limiting the height consistent with the surrounding area, as well as limiting the dimensions and overall bulk of a proposed building, can help ensure that the new building does not overwhelm the adjacent building and contribute to perceptions of overcrowding, loss of privacy, or other negative impacts.

Building setbacks, meaning the distance from the front, side, and rear property lines to the building. Increased setbacks can add open space, allow for landscaped buffers, and reduce impacts such as perceived crowding, noise, or appearance.

Building orientation, meaning the relationship of entrances (typically the front) and delivery or loading areas (typically the back) to adjacent development. The potential impacts arise from noise and lighting at the main entrance as well as delivery or loading areas.

Site features, including parking lots, lighting, outdoor storage, storage buildings, fences, signs, outdoor sales areas, and dumpsters. Negative impacts associated with these features typically include appearance, noise, lights, and odors.

Appearance may include building materials, roof pitch, color, or architectural style.

Noise impacts typically come from the parking lot, from trucks loading and unloading in the delivery area, and from locations where large numbers of people may gather outdoors (pools, playgrounds, and ball courts, for example).

Lighting impacts are caused by outdoor lights in parking lots and pedestrian areas, as well as lighted signs and security lighting on the building. Light may spill over to adjacent properties.

Odors are typically associated with some manufacturing processes, but often are an issue in dumpster placement, particularly for restaurants.

Other conditions may address the hours of operation, location, and design for outdoor sales and storage, location of driveways, location and design of landscaping and landscaped buffers, and location and design of fences and walls.

Conditional uses provide a good tool to address important issues of compatibility and meet the need for services and facilities in our neighborhoods.

Engendering a Greater Understanding of Planning in Prince George's County, Maryland

Karen Finucan Clarkson



Courtesy, M-NCPPC

Rendering of Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center. Rising from the banks of the Potomac River, National Harbor is a 300-acre, mixed-use development featuring thousands of residential units, scores of shops and offices, two marinas, and five hotels, including the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, the largest such facility on the East Coast.

“There was a perception that the planning board spoke only to the development community,” says Samuel J. Parker, Jr., AICP, chair of the Prince George’s County Planning Board. “Over the last four years we’ve been proactive in engaging the community and have tried to turn things around.”

Composed mostly of what Parker refers to as “community activists,” the five-member planning board has put community outreach at the top of its priority list. Not only has the board worked to increase citizen understanding of the regulatory process—“so they no longer come in right at the end where their influence is often less,” Parker says—but the board has let staff and developers know that it “expects sufficient community outreach, beyond what’s required by statute.”

The planning board is part of a larger organization, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). Established in 1927 by the state legislature, M-NCPPC consists of 10 commissioners, half each from Prince George’s and Montgomery counties. The planning boards meet separately to review and administer planning and land-use matters in their respective counties and gather

together once a month to deal with issues of a more regional nature. “The issue of growth is large,” says Fern Piret, Prince George’s county planning director. “Where do we urbanize and how fast do we do it?” The Prince George’s Planning Board functions as both a quasi-judicial and advisory body. “They are the final authority in cases of subdivision approvals. The appeal is to the circuit court,” says Piret. “With most other cases, they are recommending to the county council serving as the district council.”

The planning board in Prince George’s County is unusual in many respects. “Not only are we responsible for planning, land use, and zoning for the county, but parks and recreation as well,” says Parker.

The position of chairman is a full-time, salaried position, paid about \$130,000 annually. The stipend for first-term board members is \$18,500 and those in a second or later term receive \$25,000 each year.

Board members, including the chairman, serve four-year terms and may be reappointed indefinitely. They are nominated by the county executive and confirmed by the county council. No more than three members may belong to the same political party. “In our county we currently have three Democrats and two Republicans,” says Piret.



Courtesy M-NCPPC; staff photographer Gail Galenarz



Courtesy M-NCPPC; staff photographer Cassi Hayden

(Above, right) Prince George's County's fifteen metro stations serve as critical links in a well-developed, multi-modal transportation network and provide invaluable opportunities for transit oriented development in the County. (Below, right) Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. From left: Commissioner Jesse Clark; Vice Chairman Sylvester Vaughns; Chairman Samuel J. Parker, Jr., AICP; Commissioner John Squire; and Commissioner Sarah Cavitt.

Balancing Urban, Suburban, and Rural Needs in a Growing County

As Prince George's County continues to evolve, its planning board is looking to give communities tools to allow for more appropriate development. "We are a suburban community of 500 square miles, some of it rural. This county is quickly developing into an urban environment," says planning board chair Samuel J. Parker, AICP. "How we get the proper kind of projects—ones that make sense in a more urban environment—is a challenge."

To that end, the county is rewriting its zoning code "to give more adaptability to different types of development in the different areas we have," says Parker. "The planning and approval processes need to take into consideration how this county is changing."

Because development in the eastern portion of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area lagged behind for years, Prince George's County now is poised to benefit from its economic development efforts. "We have Metro stops that haven't been developed and where the potential is extreme," says Parker.

"We are doing everything we can to make sure development is ready to go at Metro stations when developers become interested," says Fern Piret, the county's planning director. "There should be no impediment to investment."

"Our focus is on mixed use around Metro stations," adds Sylvester Vaughns, the board's vice chair. "We want to make sure these areas are not overwhelmed with housing, that there are commercial, retail, and live-work units."

"There's been an ongoing debate in the county about how to preserve our rural character, generally along the rivers," says Piret. "We need to draw the line and hold on to it. There's been much debate, and tension, about where the line should be."

The discussion is complicated, according to Piret, by the fact that some rural land isn't appropriate for agriculture. "The land was in tobacco for far too long and the soil isn't that great," she says.

Historic preservation is another major focus for the planning board. "We established a historic preservation grant program that the board administers," says Piret. "They've given out about half a million dollars a year for each of the last two years, and we've budgeted the same amount for this year. Many historic preservation planners are architectural historians, focusing on large houses. But what we also have to preserve in our county are the cultural and historic influences that have shaped Prince George's and the region over many, many years."

Current board members come from a variety of backgrounds but each has been active in the community. "We're not heavy on developers or lawyers, though it has been that way before my service began six years ago," says Sylvester Vaughns, the board's vice-chair. "You might say we have people who lean toward more development or less development, but none of them represent a special interest like that."

The planning board meets each Thursday for morning and afternoon sessions. Board members also attend a monthly M-NCPPC meeting. "It is a lot of work," says Vaughns, who reserves each Tuesday evening for a thorough review of the week's agenda, submitted materials, and staff reports.

"We have a good board that works hard," says Vaughns. "We each have different views, but that works in the best interest of the community. When we sit down to discuss a case, you can never be sure what will happen. What you can be sure of is that you're going to get a thoughtful decision."

Online Innovations for the Public Hearing: The Land Development Application Search Tools

Troy L. Bunch and Warren Kron

**CITY PARISH PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

MONDAY 5:00P.M.

**GOVERNMENTAL BUILDING ROOM 348
222 SAINT LOUIS STREET**

CASE

LAND USE

From: PUD 3-09, Trinity Lutheran Church (Concept)

To: CUP 9-09, South Baton Rouge Presbyterian Church

REZON

From: SS-22-09

To: SS-34-09

WIREL

DP-7-09

DP-2-09

**FOR INFORMATION CALL
389-3144**

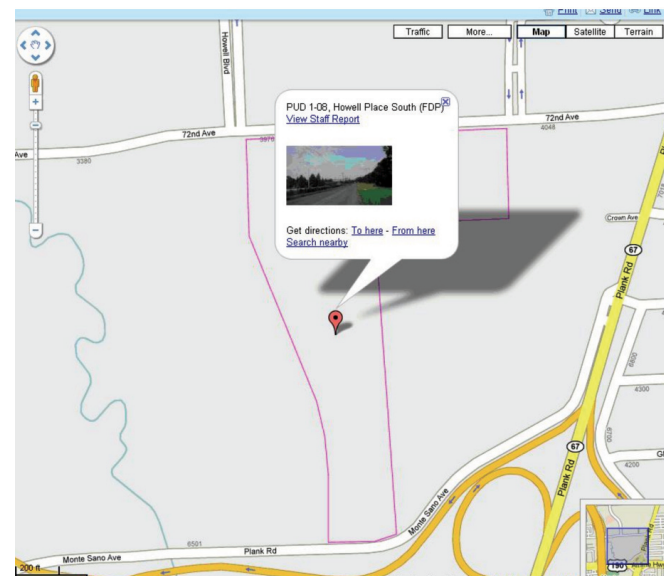
www.brgov.com/dept/planning

To learn more about Monthly Planning and Zoning Cases, please visit the [CPPC homepage](#) or contact the Office of the Planning Commission at (225) 389-3144.

For technical questions, contact the Planning Commission's GIS Department at gis@brgov.com

Updated: August 10, 2009
Next Update: September 10, 2009

Right: Legal requirements for public meetings include a posted sign on the affected property. Left: Online planning tools expand the availability and amount of information for the public. The planning agency can locate the property on a Google map and organize documents relative to the application.



Introduction

How can new online tools be used to enhance participation in planning? The City of Baton Rouge and Parish of East Baton Rouge Planning Commission have created a tool that has greatly enhanced their public hearing through better citizen participation. Planners and planning commissioners believe that successful urban and regional planning requires active citizen participation during both the planning processes and the development and implementation of comprehensive plans. The East Baton Rouge Parish's Horizon Plan—the 20-year

comprehensive land-use and development plan—was created with much public support and input.

The city and the parish encourage public participation at all levels of the planning process, for without citizen input, the job of the commission and its staff is much more difficult. Thus the planning commission embarked on this innovative project to inform citizens and encourage public participation.

Background

Planning commissions throughout the United States depend on successful public notification for pending land development proposals. As required by local ordinance, public notification includes posting a sign at least 10 days prior to the hearing. The sign is posted on the site under consideration



and describes the proposed action for the property. The law also requires that information about each case be published as public notices in the local newspaper at least three times before the public hearing. Finally, the planning commission is required to send a notice by mail 15 days before the public hearing to adjacent property owners located within 150 feet of the property that is requesting a change.

Through the years, residents of East Baton Rouge Parish have often complained about the size and visibility of the signs. On several occasions, the parish considered designing and printing larger signs, but this always proved to be too costly. Additionally, awareness levels generated by printed legal advertisements decreased as the number of newspaper subscribers decreased. Also, because the adjacent property notification is sent to the property owner, some business or residential occupants may not be aware of changes in their respective areas.

Although the planning commission began posting the monthly case lists and materials on its website several years ago, it still was not providing sufficient information regarding the specific locations and surrounding areas of the proposed actions. There continued to be citizens who remained unaware of a proposed land-use change until after the fact. This is a common dilemma for planning agencies.

As these problems with public notification began to rise, the planning commission decided to expand its notifications. In October 2008, the commission launched the Land Development Application Search Tool (LDAST), an interactive mapping application accessible from the planning commission website. The application helps the public locate and learn more about the planning and zoning cases that come before the commission monthly. The nine-member commission considers various types of land development applications and changes for approval. These range from rezoning and land-use plan amendments to site plans for new commercial construction.

Development

New Internet tools provided other opportunities. Staff already used Google Maps to locate sites for posting notification signage. Consequently, they constructed LDAST from this readily available and practical open source platform. In its most simple state, this innovative mapping application displays the location of the various cases on a map with a pushpin symbol. An interactive map displays monthly planning and zoning case information within the recognizable Google Maps interface. Using data contained in the land development applications, LDAST provides the geographic location of each case, the case number, staff recommendation, planning commission agenda, vicinity maps, site plans, and photography. The data is accessed by a link on the planning commission website where other monthly planning and zoning case information is available.

The information is displayed within Google Maps using a combination of XML, PDF, and JPEG file types. The LDAST user is provided with additional benefits such as Google Street View, satellite imagery, routing, and street address search. Picasa, Google's photo editing software, is used to display photographs of the subject property that are collected by planning commission staff during the site visit and posting.

Local government public-access cable television channel entered the picture when staff provided a demonstration explaining how to access and use LDAST on local television. The planning commission and metropolitan council received separate presentations. The two boards enthusiastically began using it immediately. Interested stakeholders such as the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Board of Realtors, and council members hosting town hall meetings began requesting information sessions and presentations. In time, the LDAST has also proven to be very popular among the local development community and citizens. As a result, it has encouraged the public to participate in, and thereby influence, land development decisions and the planning process in Baton Rouge.

The current version of LDAST has undergone many enhancements since the initial release. The search function started out relatively simple, including the case list and a street name and address search. Staff enhanced the user interface by applying the style and format of the familiar posted sign.

The LDAST application is interactive, allowing the public to pan around a map window, locate their property or properties of interest, view satellite imagery, and see street-level photographs. . . . (the) site is flexible enough to allow for continual information updates by staff.

Citizens already associate the yellow sign with the planning commission, so it was the obvious stylistic choice. The information on the sign is also reflected on the LDAST webpage, which includes the hearing date, case number, current and proposed zoning, and land-use amendments. Recent efforts have been executed to allow faster downloads when accessing PDF documents of cases that include staff recommendations, vicinity maps, and other associated files.

Future enhancements may include the addition of existing and future land-use thematic layers in the legend. These would have the ability to turn on and off and to render with some degree of transparency. Zoning polygons, a council district search tool, historical case data, and a hyperlink to the CPPC Neighborhood Survey may also be integrated.

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Release

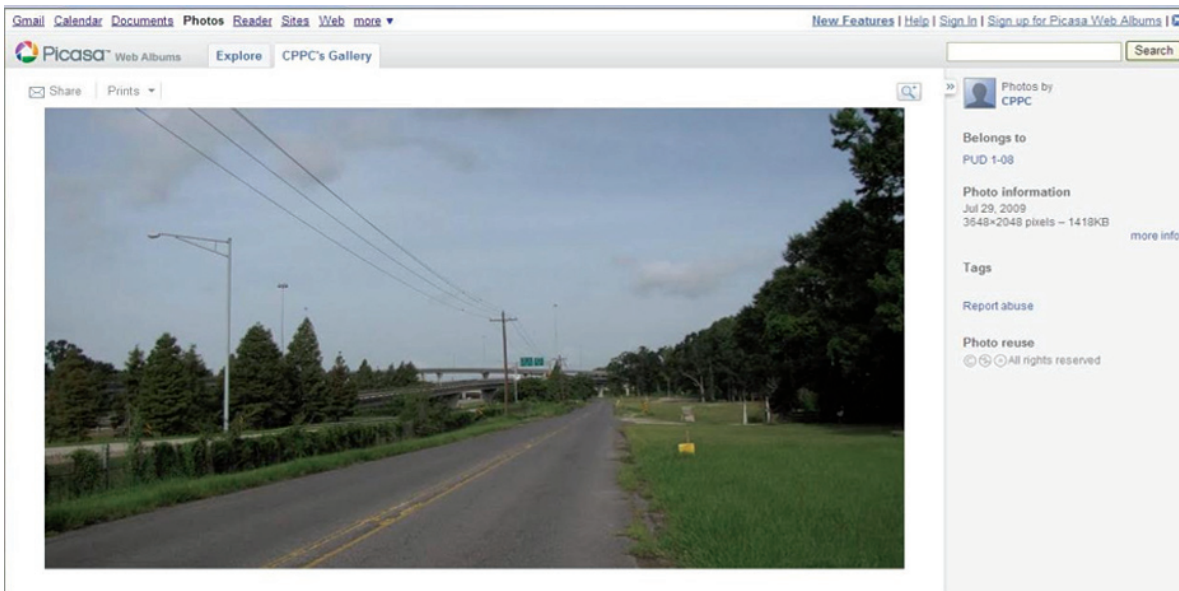
Since LDATA's release, other municipalities have developed similar applications.

The most intriguing part of the application is its use of familiar open source software, Google Maps and Picasa, to convey information. The LDATA application was created in-house by planning commission GIS staff and is supported by technicians at the information services department. The geographic data is generated using Intergraph Corporation's GeoMedia Professional. Other available information such as staff reports, vicinity maps, and photographic documentation are created using in-house hardware and software. The LDATA application is interactive, allowing the public to pan around a map window, locate their property or properties of interest, view satellite imagery, and see street-level photographs. Furthermore, the LDATA site is flexible enough to allow for continual information updates by staff.

The amount of information that can be viewed using LDATA, combined with its clear graphic display, is perfect for the general public as well as staff planner, and aids the overall planning process.

How to Use LDATA

1. Go to <http://brgov.com/dept/planning/meetingsagendas.htm> and click the link "Land Development Application Search Tool" under the Resources heading.
 2. The site opens to a display of Parish of East Baton Rouge in the center of the map window. The left sidebar contains the search tools and information about the current planning commission case list.
 3. The basic on-screen tools to manipulate the map are:
 - a. zoom in and out; panning
 - b. the ability to turn the map on and off; satellite and terrain views
 - c. Google's Street View, available by clicking on and dragging the yellow "stick man" to a street in the map window that is highlighted in blue
 4. Click "Start Here" on the left sidebar for a list of cases available in the drop-down menu titled "Case."
 5. Select a case and the map will re-center on the subject property.
 6. The Land Use Amendment, Rezoning, and Wireless Tower information on the sidebar will also populate once a specific case is selected.
 7. In the map window there are numerous push-pins that represent the case list. Click on a push-pin and certain attributes about that case appear in a dialog box. The information includes:
 - a. case number
 - b. case description
 - c. link to the staff report
 - d. thumbnail photo
 - e. to/from directions
 8. By clicking the "View Staff Report" link, an Adobe PDF document will automatically download and open to display the staff recommendation, vicinity map(s), and any pertinent site plans.
 9. If the thumbnail photograph is clicked, Picasa will open in a new browser to display all recent photos of the subject property.
-



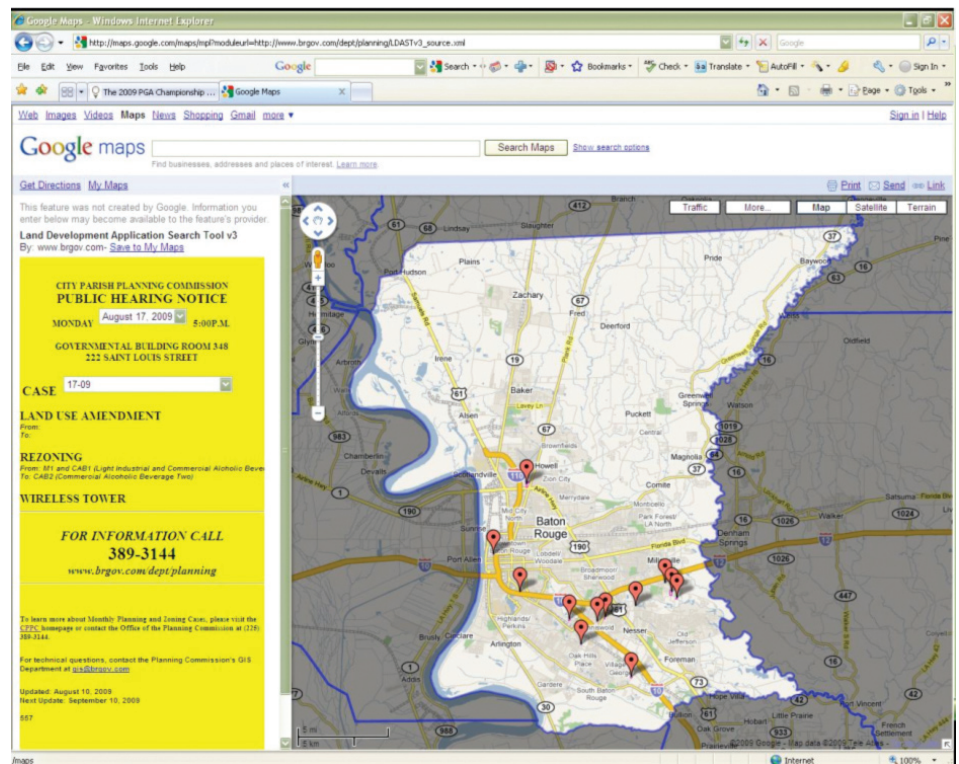
LDAST provides not only the application document and location information, but street views and maps at various scales.

Suggestions from peer review sessions were integrated into the final design. Once completed it was announced through a news release and television promotion that invited public comment and suggestions for additional improvements. What is so impressive about LDAST? It provides the public with the same comprehensive planning and zoning information given to planning commissioners and metropolitan council members. To maintain the integrity of this program, staff devotes meticulous attention to quality control and ensures that the information released is accurate.

An excellent feature of an online tool is the ability to track how many people have used it. The site uses a counter to record month visitors. Activity levels fluctuate, but the site has been consistently well-utilized by the public. Presentations on the tool provided the opportunity for questions and answers and for other feedback and suggestions that will lead to further improvements.

Conclusion

In the near future, most planning agencies will likely use open source software to provide the public with information about land development applications. Google Maps is so widely used that Internet users find a familiar tool. The flexibility and ease of use for developers and citizens make open source mapping applications a major improvement in information dissemination. LDAST and its use of open software are readily transferable to other municipalities.



The amount of information that can be viewed using LDAST, combined with its clear graphic display, is perfect for the general public as well as staff planner, and aids the overall planning process. The hope is that more discussion about land development activities in the city and parish of Baton Rouge will lead to better projects and a higher quality of life in the area.

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the project, which will allow abandoned properties along the streetcar line to be “recycled” for economic development and affordable housing.

Secretary Donovan stated, “Not only does this comprehensive investment have the potential to fundamentally transform one of the most historic neighborhoods of the city; for us, it is the model for the more effective award process we want to see in communities throughout the country.” It is also a model that could be expanded into other federal programs and agencies.

Looking ahead, the administration is pursuing additional funding for planning and community sustainability. In its FY 2011 budget request, HUD is seeking \$150 million for the Sustainable Communities Initiative. In addition, HUD is hoping to transition the HOPE VI program into a \$250 million Choice Neighborhoods initiative that would expand the use and eligibility of redevelopment assistance. Congress approved \$60 million to fund a Choice Neighborhoods pilot program in FY 2010. That funding is expected to be available this summer.

The DOT budget calls for more than \$500 million for programs related to the interagency partnership. This includes creating a new office of livability at DOT and \$200 million in planning capacity building grants from the Federal Highway Administration. The Administration is also calling on Congress to fund a \$4 billion infrastructure fund that would function much like the TIGER grant program. A variety of new funds would likely be part of a new surface transportation authorization; SAFETEA-LU expired last September and was extended through the end of 2010.

EPA is expanding the existing smart growth technical assistance program by \$10 million and working to expand the brownfields program to broaden eligible uses for area-wide planning. The departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Treasury are proposing a new healthy food access initiative that includes support for planning and local capital projects.

All of these new requests are currently being debated on Capitol Hill as part of the ongoing appropriations process. Fiscal pressures may make it challenging to secure funding for all the new initiatives, but many on Capitol Hill have strongly supported the administration’s sustainability efforts as making government more efficient and building value in communities and regions for the long term.

APA Web Sources

Check out APA’s Policy webpage (www.planning.org/policy) for a variety of resources discussing legislative, advocacy, and policy issues. Highlights include:

Policy News for Planners

A blog by APA’s Director of Policy and Government Affairs covering legislation and federal policy of interest to planners.
<http://blogs.planning.org/policy>

Domestic Policy Watch

A column by APA Chief Executive Officer W. Paul Farmer, FAICP, on fundamental issues of concern to America’s communities.
www.planning.org/domesticpolicy/previous.htm

APA Policy Guides

Briefs that represent the collective thinking of our members and represent the policy of the organization on pressing policy concerns such as affordable housing, surface transportation, energy, and climate change.
www.planning.org/policy/guides

2010 Legislative Priorities

APA’s annual slate of priorities and our platform for advancing planning.
www.planning.org/policy/priorities

Federal Policy and Program Briefing

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October 13, 2010

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Regulating Controversial Uses

November 10, 2010

CM | 1.5

Audience: planning officials and planners

Staying Out of Court by Avoiding Pitfalls

December 8, 2010

CM | 1

Audience: planning officials and planners

Retrofitting Corridors

January 19, 2011

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Mastering Meeting Management

February 16, 2011

CM | 1

Audience: planning officials and planners

Mitigating Hazards Through Planning

March 16, 2011

CM | 1.5

Performance Measures in Transportation Planning

April 20, 2011

CM | 1.5

Renewable Local Energy

May 11, 2011

CM | 1.5

Sustainability Planning for Officials

June 8, 2011

Audience: planning officials

2011 Planning Law Review

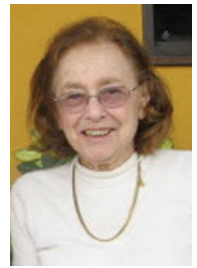
June 29, 2011

CM | 1.5 | Law

Audience: planning officials and planners

To Be a Planning Board Member or Not

Carol J. Thomas, FAICP



Mayors frequently seek local professional planners to serve on local boards and commissions. Is it a good idea? It certainly seems so from the standpoint of the community. A knowledgeable, presumably qualified, and unbiased person serves the public at no cost to the public: in effect, a pro bono consultant.

On the other hand, there are disadvantages. Board members are often hesitant to express themselves until the professional has spoken and presumably given the proper point of view. The presumption is that the planner expresses his opinion based on knowledge, sound practice, and experience, and thus debate may be stifled.

The professional may not only intimidate the other members of the board, but citizens at public meetings or hearings are often reluctant to express opinions that might be contradictory to the professional's view. The members of the board and the community not only want the benefit of the professional's knowledge and judgment, but they expect that the professional will provide information, analysis, and answers to questions—in effect, do the work of the board or staff.

Once the professional planner speaks, the other board members usually stop discussing the topic and offering input. Likewise, if the board member is a prominent practicing professional or educator, the staff can also be intimidated. This is especially the case when the professional board member has an area of specialty relevant to the issue at hand.

How to be a board member

The professional planner can make a major contribution by providing information and experience without being a member of a decision-making board or commission. If you're a planner who decides to serve on a local board or commission, however, you should:

1. Be prepared: Study the issues and prepared studies; local planning procedures and regulations; statutes (which are enabling in some states); procedures; and customs.
2. Attend meetings regularly and punctually; listen, and respect the local procedures.
3. Do your homework!
4. Know the players.
5. Reach out to constituents.
6. Don't aggressively impose your views.
7. Wait for others to express themselves first so your opinion does not intimidate them.

On balance, based on my experience as a board member, I have concluded that it is preferable *not* to have professional planner as a member of a policy making board. What do you think? Reply to education@planning.org and APA will post your replies on *The Commissioner* website.

To register, go to
www.planning.org/audioconference
 Register by September 14 and save!

The Garden in the City: Savannah

James Oglethorpe designed one of the most enduringly attractive city plans for Savannah in 1732. While the signature features are the park squares in the center of 60- by 90-foot wards, the original plan included garden and farm lots on the periphery, creating a regional settlement form. The city was formed as part of the English settlement of the Colony of Georgia.

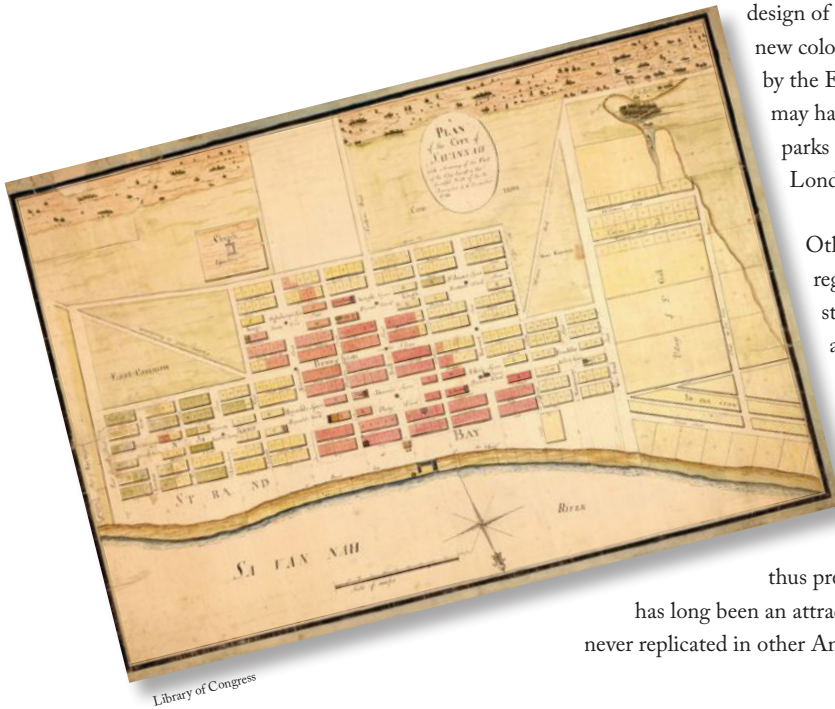
Oglethorpe may have been influenced in his design of this graceful plan of squares by the new colonies created in Northern Ireland by the English king. Other influences may have included the elegant private parks built in wealthy neighborhoods in London in the 18th century.

Other features in the city include a regular pattern of 75-foot-wide main streets, 37.5-foot-wide minor streets, and back alleys of 22.5 feet.

Over the next century the city continued to expand based on this model. Over time more dense development occurred outside the core historic area,

thus preserving the plan. While the city

has long been an attractive tourist site, the plan itself was never replicated in other American cities.



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