

# Use Story Mapping for Better Reports

## PLANNING TOOLS

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS ARE becoming much more sophisticated, and the types of information that planning commission-

ers review are also more integrated than ever before. That means there's a shift in how staff reports and development plans are presented to the commission. One of those new tools is called "story mapping."

Story mapping has a handful of definitions, depending on the profession using it. In the IT world the term can refer to a graphic map that shows the functionality of a system; in education, it can refer to a mapping process that analyzes a project or book that allows students to develop their own assignments around the story. For the field of planning, the definition from the GIS firm Esri is most helpful: Story mapping combines maps with narrative text, images, and multimedia content. "[Story maps] make it easy to harness the power

of maps and geography to tell your story."

Recently, APA produced a popular webinar, "Effectively Communicate with the Planning Commission" ([media2.planning.org/media/stream/ecpc.htm](http://media2.planning.org/media/stream/ecpc.htm)). The online and interactive program, which is free, introduced planning commissioners and planners to this new set of multimedia tools that can be used to describe a project or a plan. The Philadelphia Planning Commission and Esri presented the webinar.

Today, most commissioners prepare for a commission meeting by reviewing a packet of printed materials prepared by planning staff. Much of the material is also made available to the public, most often by posting on the community website. These packets may include a written report, photographs, and copies of pertinent maps. During the commission meeting, the commissioners and the public may listen to a formal presentation, often with

PowerPoint slides, photos, and graphics, as well as maps, or, in very major projects, a scale model.

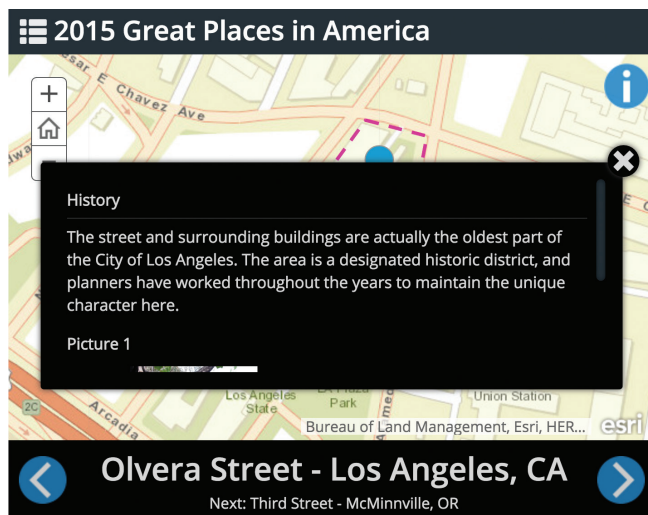
A meeting that used story mapping would begin with instructions to the commissioners and the public to view online materials prior to the meeting. These might include maps, pertinent sections of the plan and ordinances, photographs, and other graphic material. The story map would combine those items into a unique story related to the specific plan or project. However, the material would not be static—the approach allows both commissioners and the public to view more information, a broader area, and more background information. Finally, developers, staff, or proponents of a project would use all the media to create and present a narrative.

To give you an idea of what this might look like, let's examine a few examples of how APA has used story mapping.



The story often begins with an overview map, such as this one showing the locations of Great Places in America.





At APA, showing how sound planning adds value to communities is a top priority. One of the most prominent ways we tell this story is with Great Places in America—our flagship communications campaign that honors the neighborhoods, streets, and public spaces across America that, with years of thoughtful and deliberate planning, have added value to communities. In 2015, we placed an even greater emphasis on telling the stories of these places using highly visual tools like videos, podcasts, and images. Esri provided the opportunity to combine all of these visual elements into one platform: the story map.

Like Google Maps, story maps make it easy for users to dive deeper into a map and explore more. With the Great Places 2015 story map, people visiting the site can find out in just a few clicks what makes each designation special.

Story maps have benefits that extend beyond providing information in a novel way. Because of the eye-catching look, story maps are well received on social media where images catch the attention of viewers faster than words. Story maps attract audiences who might not otherwise have been interested in your content—something that might be particularly important for a planning commission looking to en-

gage new groups of people in the planning process.

Last year, APA also explored using story maps to help educate our members and elected officials about policy issues important to planners. In an effort to explain why it was necessary for Congress to reauthorize and fully fund critical funding for national, state, and urban parks, we built a story map that not only provided county breakdowns of the impact of funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, but also information about where Congress was in the reauthorization process, and how our members could urge them to take action.

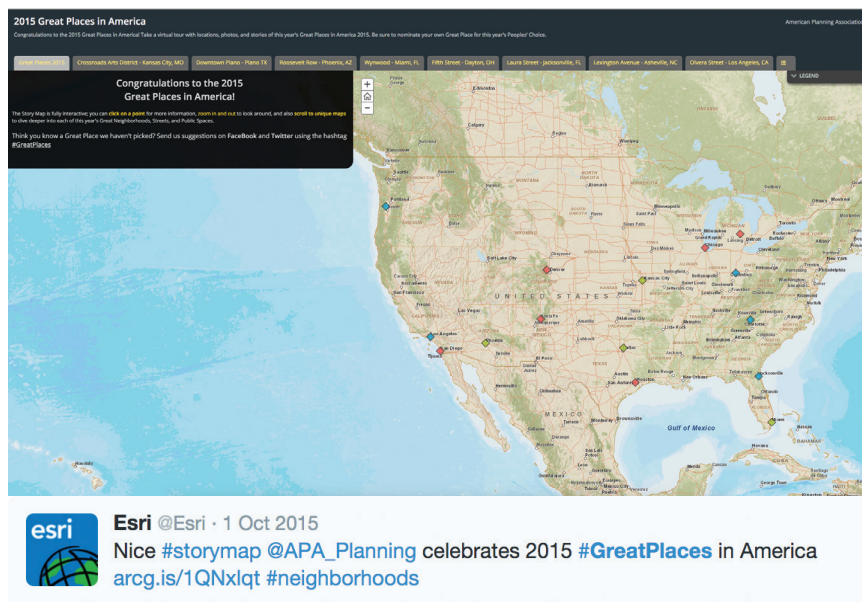
By making our information more digestible, we found that partner organizations like the National Recreation and Park Association were willing to share our content with their members and networks, therefore expanding our reach, and ultimately, our impact.

Story maps have challenged staff at APA to communicate complex issues and ideas in bite-sized, concise messages. By pairing clear messages with interactive data and multimedia, APA has been able to strengthen the narrative about why planning adds value to communities.

Planning commissioners and planning staffs can use this tool, too. For more examples from Esri on using story maps, go to [storymaps.arcgis.com/en](http://storymaps.arcgis.com/en).

—Emily Pasi

Pasi is APA's policy and communications associate.





# Infrastructure Planning



Work began almost immediately to rebuild the collapsed bridge spanning the Mississippi River in Minneapolis.

## BEST PRACTICES

ON AUGUST 1, 2007, THE MINNEAPOLIS I-35W BRIDGE COLLAPSED INTO the Mississippi River, setting off a national discussion of the state of America's infrastructure. It's in abysmal shape, notes the American Society of Civil Engineers, which keeps tabs on the country's bridges, water pipes, and highways. Its Report Card on America's Infrastructure ([infrastructurereportcard.org](http://infrastructurereportcard.org)) reveals consistently low marks.

While much of the attention has focused on the responsibility of the federal government in maintaining safe bridges, secure dams, and clean water, there is also a local community dimension to this issue. After the disaster, planners were prompted to consider anew the relationship between infrastructure and community planning. APA investigated the issue and published its findings in 2010 in the Infrastructure Investment Task Force's *Rebuilding America* report.

Planners point to the importance of infrastructure not only in terms of maintenance and repair, but in planning for the future. In *The Citizen's Guide to Planning*, Christopher J. Duerksen, C. Gregory Dale, FAICP, and Donald L. Elliott, FAICP, observe that the location of sewer and water infrastructure and other facilities are a major factor in growth and development. Further, they state, "While communities often see their role as providing infrastructure in response to market forces, some use their ability to invest in infrastructure as a tool to shape growth."

If infrastructure is so important, does it appear in the community's comprehensive plan or as a complementary master plan? Duerksen et al. write that it is "surprising how few local governments actively coordinate infrastructure planning with land-use planning." Michael Neuman, in "City Planning and Infrastructure: Once and Future Partners" (*Journal of Planning History*), observes the same situation. "Currently, the links between infrastructure and city planning may be described as numerous, but nonstrategic and noncomprehensive, even as the bond between infrastructure and cities remains tight."

Infrastructure is by no means unplanned. Engineering departments, public and private utility authorities, and large regional agencies, such as transportation, plan for infrastructure. Planning staff will consult these plans as they assess projects and develop new plans, yet the criticism that these plans often remain uncoordinated with the general or comprehensive plan has merit.

One reason for the disconnect may be rooted in who does the planning and with what funds. Large transportation projects require plans that meet federal standards for roads, highways, and bridges. The rules under which they operate require close coordination with agencies often beyond the scope of the local planning commission. So too, the expertise to build and maintain a lot of infrastructure lies with other professions and agencies, such as engineering. Therefore, engineering or transportation departments develop many of these plans, without integration with other agencies and experts.

Nonetheless, the links may be numerous. An important example is the Capital Improvements Plan that coordinates a city's larger investments in infrastructure. A significant number of communities have made this connection explicit. APA Research Associate Ann Dillemath, AICP, describes this linkage in Lincoln, Nebraska:

"Lincoln's six-year CIP is updated annually beginning in winter, when city departments prepare their proposed capital improvement program. The CIP is reviewed for conformity with the city-county comprehensive plan by the planning commission. Then the mayor forwards the CIP, along with the planning commission's recommendation and public testimony to the Lincoln City Council. The entire process . . . culminates in the council's adoption of a one-year capital budget. . . ."

Likewise, Ann Arbor, Michigan's program includes information about the city's interagency review teams and invites the public to propose infrastructure projects for funding.

### Different kinds of infrastructure

Different communities and professions define infrastructure in different ways. Some communities use a broad approach and encompass transportation, water (as well as stormwater), telecommunications,



utilities, parks and recreation, energy, education, public health, the environment, libraries, cultural resources, harbors, airports, police, and justice. Others focus on the first few.

Infrastructure plans in Bend, Oregon, are prepared by the Department of Engineering and Infrastructure Planning, which has created four master plans: water, collection system, water reclamation, and stormwater. Elsewhere in the state, Portland prepares a Citywide Systems Plan described in this way:

“The Citywide Systems Plan (CSP) is a coordinated 20-year plan for the City of Portland’s municipal infrastructure systems, including transportation, water, stormwater, sewer, parks and natural areas, and

other publicly owned facilities and systems. Many of these systems are supplemented by public facilities that are owned and managed by other public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private entities. The CSP acknowledges these critical relationships but only describes and plans for City systems.”

Los Angeles takes an encompassing approach. The Department of City Planning produced a 2014 *Growth and Infrastructure Report*—not a plan, but a report. It covers 13 areas from fire and power to parks and harbors. The purpose is to summarize plans and provide links among plans, monitor change, and evaluate the city’s progress toward meeting the goals of the general plan.



This greenway infrastructure in Henderson, Nevada, captures stormwater, allows for seasonal flooding, and provides a recreational amenity.



A form of infrastructure built with local support is light rail. This attractive station is in downtown Phoenix.

This serves the purpose that planners David Godschalk, FAICP, and Edward Kaiser, FAICP, describe as an important role for planners in *Urban Land Use Planning*. “Although planners do not design these [infrastructure] facilities, they must maintain up-to-date information on the demand, remaining capacity, and service that each provides,” they write. In other words, these plans, reports, and data inform community planning and guide community planning decisions.

A new type of infrastructure has developed over the past few years and planning has taken a lead in cultivating it. “Green infrastructure” uses natural systems to handle stormwater and preserve drinking water without resorting exclusively to hard—sometimes called “gray”—systems such as concrete-lined river beds. Green infrastructure is a network of natural lands that conserves regional ecosystems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s definition focuses on stormwater management systems that mimic nature by absorbing and storing water, typically at the site or district scale (e.g., bioswales, green streets, and green roofs). In this approach, once separate infrastructure elements, such as stormwater management/flood control and parkland are planned in tandem to serve multiple purposes.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania, adopted its green infrastructure plan in 2011, and many communities have addressed this as a section of the comprehensive plan, connected it to a parks and recreation plan, or developed it as its own independent plan.

Although the planning commission and its staff planners seldom have direct responsibility for creating infrastructure plans, they should claim a role in the planning process—whether a CIP process or infrastructure planning process—in order to support the well-being and future development of the community. Commissioners and planning staff should be informed about the plans and seek to promote meaningful connections among the plans.

—Carolyn Torma

*Torma is the editor of The Commissioner and APA’s director of education and citizen engagement.*



# Do the Right Thing: Ethics for Commissioners

## LAW

### U.S. SUPREME COURT

Justice Potter Stewart (1915–1985) remarked that “ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to

do and what is right to do.” This maxim is especially relevant for planning and land-use commissioners who are in positions of substantial authority and are privy to information often not held by others. Commissioners know what they *have* a right to do, but how can they decide what is right *to* do?

### Whom do you serve?

First and foremost, elected and appointed public officials must determine to whom they owe an obligation. This is no easy task for a commissioner—is it to the chair of the commission or to the chief elected official? If you are elected, is your main obligation to the people who elected you or to the political party that nominated you? Do you consider all the citizens of the community to be those you serve, or does your constituency extend to those outside your political jurisdiction who might benefit from what you may do, such as in preserving open space and historic resources, or providing affordable housing so that they might have an opportunity to live in your community?

All those who are involved in land-use decision making must ultimately ask themselves the question of whether they have a moral and ethical obligation to an even larger constituency, one that spans time. In short, they must consider the possibility that they owe an obligation in their decision making of today to further the interests of generations not yet born; as when we protect a sole-source aquifer, a ridgetop view, or a sacred place from destruction.

### Where do you find guidance?

Once you have resolved the question of who you serve, then you can begin the task of determining how you must



See a clear decision by applying the “light of day” test to your ethical dilemmas.

conduct yourself. Fortunately, the American Planning Association provides us its Ethical Principles and Planning, available at [planning.org/ethics/ethicalprinciples.htm](http://planning.org/ethics/ethicalprinciples.htm). It is intended as a guide for ethical conduct to all involved in planning, recognizing that “the planning process exists to serve the public interest.” Guidelines, though, are only that. They are suggestive of how one should conduct oneself; they are not rules of conduct, meaning there is no penalty if you do not follow them. Guidelines often may serve more to stimulate discussion and further deliberation of what is right and wrong, and what is good and bad.

APA has many other resources on ethics. Commissioners may find it useful and stimulating to set aside some time at their meetings, on a regular basis, perhaps a few times a year, to review the Ethical Principles in Planning and to discuss some of the hypotheticals and problem sets available in the literature. The Texas Chapter of APA has a chapter on “Ethics and the Planning Commissioner” written by Carol Barrett, FAICP, as part of *A Guide to Urban Planning and Texas Communities* (2013), available at [tinyurl.com/glahh6e](http://tinyurl.com/glahh6e). Discussing the principles, considering hypotheticals, and developing your commission’s own rules of conduct will help to improve the “issue spotting” capabilities of all commissioners such that they will be able to more readily identify an ethical issue when it arises, hopefully in time to avoid an error or unnecessary delay, perhaps, in the very midst of proceedings.

The Ethical Principles in Planning has three sections, the first two of which are relevant to commissioners and a third focused on practicing planners. The headings of the sections pertinent to commissioners are self-explanatory:

Section one’s seven numbered paragraphs encompass a broad variety of considerations including making available “full, clear and accurate information on planning issues” and clarifying community goals.

The 13 paragraphs in section two address such issues as broadly defining “personal interest,” not seeking gifts or favors, protecting confidential information, and respecting the rights of all participants.

If an ethics training sessions addressed just one or two of these considerations at a sitting, and worked to flesh out what they mean in terms of practice, there would be sufficient discussion for 10 to 20 meetings.

Municipalities may also have ethical codes that may be mandated by state law. Commissioners should be familiar with those codes and ask their city manager or their legal counsel for a briefing. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, will provide free ethics training



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on request. Regardless, your commission may want to develop its own rules of conduct after careful consideration.

Finally, it is essential to communicate with your peers and others, while being mindful of confidentiality issues, when you as a commissioner feel challenged by an ethical issue. Maybe they will have experienced it before. Perhaps they will see a nuance you missed by being too close to the issue yourself. And sometimes, a decision should be made not by you, but by someone with higher authority.

### How can you look within yourself?

Two simple ways of testing your conduct to see if it is ethical can go a long way in resolving otherwise ambiguous situations.

First, consider the “light of day” test: How would you feel about your conduct if your peers and others whom you respect knew all from the front page of the local newspaper or a Facebook post? Try this the next time you feel uncomfortable about what you might do. You’ll be surprised at how easy it is to see a clear decision.

The second test is the ancient moral maxim that is so fundamental it is considered to be at the very core of human nature. It can be traced to the time of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2000–1700 BC) and the god, Maat, who said “Now this is the command: do to the doer to make him do.” It is the Golden Rule, found in virtually every religious and ethical tradition. Commissioners who put themselves in the shoes of others will often gain a perspective they couldn’t see before, when they were focused solely on their roles as commissioners.

Now who would have thought that with all the literature, rules, codes, guidelines, statutory requirements, judicial decisions, and other materials available to us in the ethics arena, that we would return to the rules we learned as children? Simply put: Ethics is at once simple and exceedingly difficult.

—Dwight Merriam, FAICP

*Merriam is a planner and attorney with Robinson + Cole, Hartford, Connecticut*

## HISTORY

### FLAVEL SHURTLEFF, CARRYING OUT THE CITY PLAN

Planning lies at the intersection of governance and private property. The legal framework for planning has been critical from the beginning. Flavel Shurtleff was a Boston attorney recruited by one of the founders of the city planning movement, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., to write the first book on the legal framework for American city planning. Historian Mel Scott writes that “Olmsted realized as early as 1909 that if the city planning movement was ever to progress beyond the planning stage and decisively influence the growth and development of cities, it would have to overcome the resistance of the courts to the broader regulation. . . .”

In 1914, Shurtleff and Olmsted’s *Carrying Out the City Plan* was published, following two years of research and interviews with mayors, planning commissioners, and city attorneys. Shurtleff also researched the legal underpinnings of planning in other countries. He found that communities needed to learn from one another through shared information and from legal precedents set by the courts. Of special concern to Shurtleff was the importance of the planning commission in ensuring that the plans moved from documents into implemented policies and development.

—Carolyn Torma



## RESOURCE FINDER

The more you consider ethical dimensions, the more valid your decisions.

### APA PUBLICATIONS APA Planners Press

Christopher J. Duerksen, C. Gregory Dale, FAICP, Donald L. Elliott, FAICP  
“Conclusion: Being a Leader,” *The Citizen’s Guide to Planning* (2013)

Jerry Weitz, FAICP  
*The Ethical Planning Practitioner* (2016)

### Other APA publications

Patricia E. Salkin  
*The Commissioner*, Spring 2005  
“Conflicts of Interest in Land Use Planning and Decision Making”

### APA STREAMING EDUCATION

Planning Commission Ethics  
2015  
[planning.org](http://planning.org)

### WEB RESOURCES

PlannersWeb Archive: Ethics  
[tinyurl.com/jggpcxl](http://tinyurl.com/jggpcxl)

Ethical Principles in Planning  
American Planning Association  
[planning.org](http://planning.org)

*Law of the Land Blog*  
Search “planning commission ethics”  
[lawoftheland.wordpress.com](http://lawoftheland.wordpress.com)