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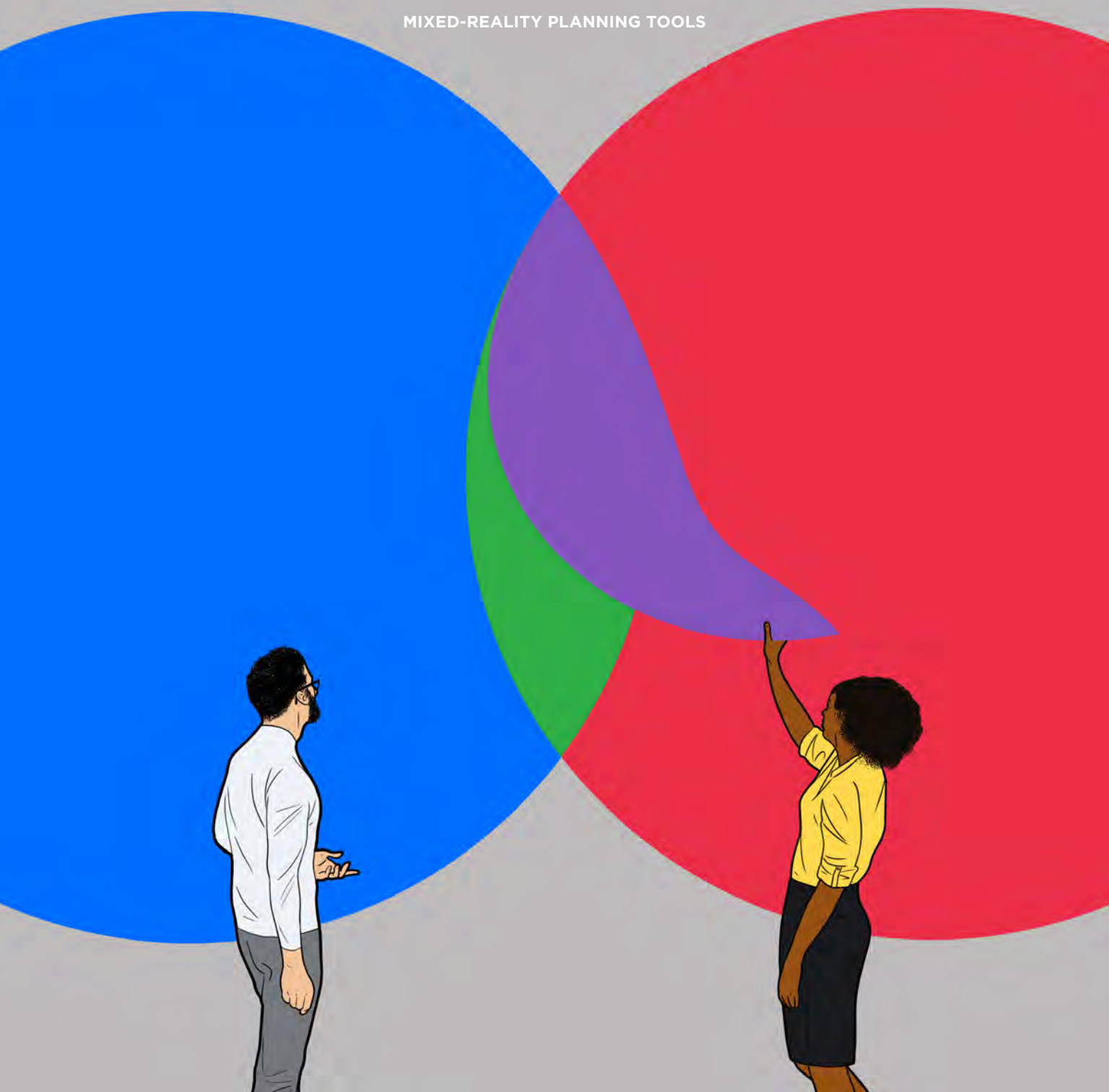

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Contents

Fall 2021 | Volume 87 | Number 4

Above: Protesters in Houston butt up against a busy transportation corridor. Right: Online community engagement.

Contributors

Ladd Keith, Sara Meerow
8 Strategies to Beat the (Extreme) Heat, page 12

The Pacific Northwest heat wave in June was a wakeup call for many communities that no place is safe from heat. Hailing from Arizona, these planning professors are no strangers to blazing temperatures. But with temps trending upward worldwide, they say communities *everywhere* need to be preparing for an inevitably hotter future.

Philip Walker, FAICP
Almost Lost, page 36

This Nashville-based planner's role in creating a plan for the historically-oppressed Gullah Geechee people of Hilton Head Island drove home why he loves his job. "From cultural preservation to revising an intricate land management ordinance, this project underscores the breadth and diversity of city planning work."

Tarana Hafiz
Six Ways to Plan Public Spaces for Civic Assembly, page 43

"The events of 2020 reintroduced the vital role public lands play as places for people, activism, and aspirations," says this planner, writer, and advocate. She works to emphasize the importance of civic spaces for public assembly, providing policy and design tools that help cultivate safe havens for sociopolitical dissidence and mobilization.

PLANNING

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

The American Planning Association will lead the way to equitable, thriving communities by creating unique insights, as well as innovative and practical approaches that enable the planning community to anticipate and successfully adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

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FROM THE DESK OF A VOLUNTEER LEADER

Affecting Positive Change from Within

AS AN ACADEMIC and university professor, I care deeply about training the next generation of planners to holistically plan for equitable communities. In the classroom, I teach students to ensure that everyone is valued and recognized, and to appreciate underrepresented and marginalized voices. As a woman of color, I help represent the traditionally marginalized Latina voice, both in the world generally, and in the planning profession specifically. I take my role seriously, both as an educator and a volunteer leader in the APA community, where I can help drive the change that we need.

I grew up on the U.S.-Mexico border, where most people look like me. When I left home for college at Texas A&M University, my entire perspective changed when I encountered the world outside my community. Out there most people did not look me, and they had no inkling of the struggles and beauty that define the Latino community. Throughout my studies, I kept searching for that sense of belonging I'd had at home. I found it through APA's Latinos and Planning Division (LAP)—a group that has helped shape my career, just as I and other LAP members have helped shape the profession.

I joined APA in 2013 and vividly remember attending my first National Planning Conference in Seattle. This was my first year in my PhD program and my mentor, who was an active LAP member, told me it was a group I just had to be part of. A group of professional Latino planners representing a diverse Latino community across the United States? It seemed too good to be true. So I attended the business meeting. Even then it was almost hard for me to believe that I had found a network of planners interested in advancing the upskilling of Latino planners and theorizing on what makes a city a welcoming Latino environment. Needless to say, I joined.

> 'I take my role seriously, both as an educator and a volunteer leader in the APA community, where I can help drive the change that we need.'
>
> —EDNA LEDESMA

That action was the catalyst to my future involvement with APA. Fast forward nearly a decade and I am still engaged in LAP, along with a wide array of networks within APA that are pushing to advance the discourse about diversity, equity, and inclusion in planning.

My level of engagement and volunteerism within APA has evolved over the years, and has put me in a position not only to grow professionally, but also to push for meaningful and positive change in planning practice and the profession. After serving as a student representative for several years, I transitioned into a leadership role. In 2017, I was elected chair of the Latinos and Planning Division.

From there, I served as an ex-officio member of the Divisions Council executive committee from 2019 to 2021; and in 2019 I became an appointed member of the APA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. Through these roles I have been invited to serve as a contributing author to the 2019 *Planning for Equity Policy Guide* and the *Planning for Equitable Economic Development Policy Guide*, which will be published later this year.

It has been a privilege to have a seat at the table and have difficult conversations with peers about the role that planning has had in marginalizing communities of color and low-income populations. Coming to terms with the dark history of planning is one step toward advancing the discourse of equity within the built environment, but this is only the beginning. There is a lot of work ahead, and I am proud to serve the APA community and continue to move forward, within the organization and beyond.

Edna Ledesma is assistant professor in the Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

After the pandemic hit, Kansas CIty, Missouri, expanded its existing limited zero-fare program to make the bus and streetcar free for all riders. Compared to other cities, the system saw a smaller dip in ridership over the past year.
MATTHEW ENDERSBE/ISTOCK EDITORIAL/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

INTER SECTIONS

WHERE PLANNING AND THE WORLD MEET

Transportation | Housing | Et cetera | Viewpoint

TRANSPORTATION

Transit Agencies Explore Transfer to Zero-Fare Systems

Fareless transit could address equity and ridership concerns exacerbated by the pandemic—if cities can figure out how to pay for it. By Jenni Bergal

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, transit agencies and cities are considering scrapping or reducing fares to ensure access for disadvantaged communities. The moves come after the pandemic highlighted inequities, as the majority of those who continued to ride buses and trains were lower-income essential workers, often people of color.

"The goal for transit is building equitable cities," says Art Guzzetti, a vice president at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). "We have this opportunity to do things a different way, invest in a different vision. Zero fares is a strategy to address that."

Public transit was hit hard by the pandemic. In the early months, ridership plummeted 76 percent nationally as commuters worked remotely, transit agencies enforced social distancing, and riders stayed away for health and safety reasons. Ridership has improved, but it was still 62 percent lower nationally in the fourth quarter of 2020 compared with the same period the previous year, according to APTA.

Many transit agencies did away with fare collection early in the pandemic to help minimize contact between riders and operators, instituting rear-door-only boarding on buses. Most agencies later returned to collecting fares—though some have not.

In Kansas City, Missouri, transit officials started a zero-fare program four years ago, first for veterans, then high school students, then later for social-service safety-net clients like domestic-abuse victims, says Robbie Makinen, the transportation authority's CEO. By the time COVID-19 struck, it was a logical move to make rides free for all, Makinen says.

The transit system, which runs buses and a streetcar, didn't see as big a dip in use during the pandemic, Makinen says. Ridership sank to 60 percent of its previous numbers and is now back up to 80 percent, with 30,000 to 40,000 passengers a day. Makinen attributes that stability to the zero-fare policy.

The financial question

"Whenever you say free transit, everyone goes crazy and says it's not free; someone's paying," he says.

"But the return on investment for empathy, compassion, for social equity, far outweighs the return on investment for concrete and asphalt. Let's invest in people, in our workforce."

On average, fare revenue covers 30 percent of transit operating costs, though it varies from system to system, says Chad Chitwood, an APTA spokesperson. Fares in Kansas City account for far less, under 10 percent of the agency's budget, or about $9 million, says Makinen. Kansas City officials agreed to cover half the missing revenue, and the transit agency paid for the other half by cutting management costs. Meanwhile, eliminating fares actually saves nearly $1 million a year, Makinen says, because that's how much it takes for new fare boxes, collections, maintenance, and picking up and transporting the money.

The zero-fare program will continue into 2022 and could be made permanent. "We believe social equity is critical," Makinen says. "All transit agencies have been so concerned with ridership. They base everything on it. But when you look at it a different way, it's whether people have access and options to be able to get around."

But making up for lost revenue may not be as easy for other transit agencies. "If you do this and have a big hole in your budget as a result and service is in jeopardy, that's a problem," says APTA's Guzzetti.

Congress has helped, with three COVID-19 relief measures together allotting nearly $70 billion to transit agencies as a stopgap. But to achieve long-term social equity in transit, Guzzetti says, federal, state, and local governments will need to make additional investments.

Los Angeles recently approved a pilot program to offer free rides on LA Metro to students, then low-income riders. Further expansion depends on financial sustainability, officials say.

In Los Angles, a recently approved pilot program could offer free rides on LA Metro—first to students in K-12 and community colleges, then, several months later, to low-income riders. But the board first wants a full financial report about how the estimated $321 million plan would be funded, as well as assurances that changes wouldn't hurt service or the maintenance program, says LA Metro spokesperson Rick Jager.

Most of LA Metro's revenue comes from voter-approved local sales taxes, which generate billions of dollars a year. But if the agency were to make all rides free, it would need to make up at least $250 million a year in lost farebox revenue, says Jager.

"The thought is to make this permanent and systemwide, eventually, if this pilot is a success," he adds. "That's what our board wants to do. But they want to make sure it's financially sustainable."

Safety concerns

Not everyone is on board with the concept.

"It's a terrible idea," says Dorothy Moses Schulz, professor emerita at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and a former police captain at the MTA Metro-North Railroad, a New York suburban commuter rail. She says letting passengers board for free would encourage more people experiencing homelessness to ride back and forth all day, driving away regular customers. It also could present added security threats, she adds.

But Kansas City's Makinen says public safety incident rates on transit have dropped 35 percent since zero fares started. The reason: 85 percent of incidents were over fare disputes, he says.

While Makinen concedes that his system is seeing more people experiencing homelessness on buses, he says the agency is addressing that by instituting a policy against "loop riding," so that when passengers reach the end of the line, they have to get off. And instead of placing armed police officers on buses, he adds, the agency is working with homeless-service agencies that have started to put outreach teams on buses, offering services and spotting problems.

"Homelessness is not a transit issue," Makinen says. "It's a community issue."

Jenni Bergal is a staff writer for Stateline *(pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline). This story was reprinted with permission from* Stateline*, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts.*

STELLA LEVI/GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK UNRELEASED

HOUSING

ADU Legislation Gains National Momentum

But a variety of regulatory and financial barriers continue to block a true construction boom. By Adina Solomon

WHILE INCREASING housing density can address scarcity and affordability issues, it often faces political hurdles, particularly in suburban and rural areas. But one measure is steadily gaining acceptance in communities of all sizes: accessory dwelling units (ADUs), or residential structures on the same property as detached single-family homes.

Over the past 20 years, hundreds of cities and counties—if not more—have embraced ADUs, says David Morley, AICP, a planner and research manager at the American Planning Association. States have gotten in on the action, too, including California and Oregon in the past few years.

That momentum has held through the pandemic, as unemployment and uncertainty around eviction moratoriums have made the existing housing crisis even more dire. Sarasota, Florida, approved new legislation in July, as did Barnstable, Massachusetts, the tenth Cape Cod town to adopt an ADU bylaw. Lexington, Kentucky, and Kalispell, Montana, near Glacier National Park, are currently considering their own.

"So many jurisdictions across the country devote more land area to single-family detached housing than any other land use," Morley says. That means plenty of backyards that could offer a new home. And in many places, homeowners are making it happen. Los Angeles, the epicenter of the nation's ADU push, saw permits increase from 71 in 2014 to 6,747 in 2019, two years after California's statewide legislation went into effect.

But elsewhere, laws alone can't kick-start an ADU boom. Local preemption, high costs, and regulatory issues are some hurdles that need to be cleared.

Uneven success

California is one of the most significant examples of what happens when a government allows ADUs, Morley says. Following statewide legislation, the number of ADU permits issued increased from 1,269 in 2016 to 14,702 in 2019. A year later, five more bills were passed to further incentivize ADUs and reduce barriers. Despite the pandemic, 12,392 permits were issued in 2020.

1,158%

The increase in ADU permits California cities issued from 2016, the year before pro-ADU legislation was passed at the state level, to 2019.

SOURCE: CALIFORNIA DEPT. OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.; BUILDINGANADU.COM

An ADU in Florence, a Massachusetts village where local bylaws were revised in 2014 to support their construction.

COURTESY BACKYARD ADUS

LA isn't the only city where construction has skyrocketed; San Jose and Oakland each saw a nine-fold or higher increase in permits between 2016 and 2020. At the same time, however, Malibu, Coronado, and other cities have enacted onerous requirements for homeowners or taken more than the mandated 60 days to review applications.

Building ADUs is a more complicated process than laws alone acknowledge, explains Ahmad Abu-Khalaf, a planner and senior research analyst on the policy development and research team at nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners. His 2020 report on barriers to ADU development identifies a number of regulatory and financial issues.

If cities want to meet affordability targets for ADU owners, they need to get more involved, he says. Most people tap into personal savings or home equity to finance construction, a challenge for lower- and moderate-income households.

"There should be more intentional efforts," says Abu-Khalaf. He calls for lending products that are tailored to ADU development and accessible to lower- and moderate-income households. He points to the nonprofit LA Más, which helped lower-income homeowners build ADUs they then rented to housing-voucher holders for at least five years.

In addition to looking at minimum lot size, height, parking, and other regulatory requirements, Abu-Khalaf says planners can work with local housing finance or affordable housing departments to develop more inclusive programs.

Adina Solomon is an Atlanta-based freelance journalist who writes about city planning and death.

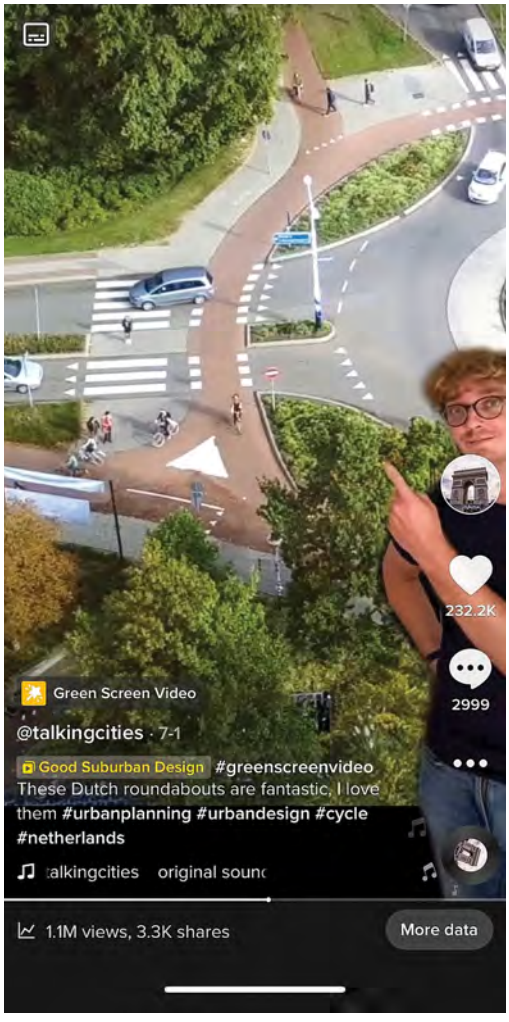
TOOLKIT

HOW TO SHARE SHARED SPACES

A new joint effort from Spur, a Bay Area-based public policy nonprofit, and design firm Gehl is encouraging cities to create shared spaces that welcome, rather than deter, people experiencing homelessness. Through case studies, tools, and community engagement tactics, *Coexistence in Public Space* offers new approaches to creating public spaces that support every need, from recreation to temporary encampments. Download it at bit.ly/coexistpublicspace.

SOCIAL MEDIA

TikTok Challenge: Urban Design



URBAN PLANNING IS going viral on TikTok, and that's due in large part to the account TalkingCities. Billed as "an introduction to urban design, city planning, and architecture" by creator Paul Stout, a Cal Poly San Luis Obispo planning student, the videos distill complex urban planning concepts and history into engaging, bite-sized content aimed to spark interest in the field. So far, he's amassed more than 150,000 followers and three million likes, with demographics that mirror TikTok's: majority teens, young adults, and women. It's a great way to engage young people in planning, he said on a recent episode of the American Planning Association's podcast, and he encourages planners to embrace the platform. Check out his content and get inspired at tiktok.com/@talkingcities.

PODCAST

Planning magazine's Lindsay Nieman talks cities, TikTok, and people-centric design with Paul Stout.

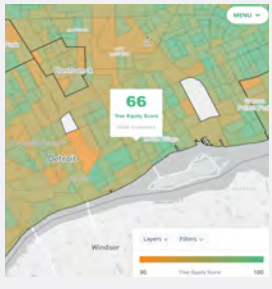
LISTEN

bit.ly/talkingcitiestiktok

STUDY

ADVANCING TREE EQUITY

Trees reduce pollution, help mitigate extreme heat, and offer a variety of other public health benefits—but across the country, urban canopies aren't equally grown. Tree Equity Score, a new study from conservation organization American Forests, grades 810 municipalities, 150,000 neighborhoods, and 486 cities on their leafy coverage. The resource also provides tips on planting and maintenance, pilot program info, and how to advance tree equity. Find your community's score and access resources at treeequityscore.org.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SPUR, GEHL; PAUL STOUT, TALKINGCITIES; AMERICAN FORESTS

VIEWPOINT

Planning Cannot Fail Health Equity

LEARNING HOW TO plan communities during a pandemic has wholly reshaped my understanding of the responsibilities of the planning profession. Though the pandemic has been a globally experienced crisis, various factors have accounted for disparate experiences in the U.S., many of which stem from planning and policy decisions.

A 2020 study published in *JAMA Network Open*, the American Medical Association's academic journal, supports this notion. According to data from a variety of large American cities, the COVID-19 infection rate in higher-poverty counties with substantially non-white populations was nearly eight times that of substantially white areas. The death rate, too, was more than nine times greater. Research gathered last year by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition also finds that formerly redlined areas have higher rates of asthma, diabetes, and other comorbidities, making those residents even more vulnerable to the virus.

Confronted with these realities in the numbers, on the news, and in my hometown, I became increasingly aware of the direct ways social determinants threaten equal access to good health. What I always considered separate issues to tackle—public health and community development—were proving themselves intrinsically intertwined. Fundamentally, health disparities are a planning issue, and planners need to take a more active role in addressing them.

This realization drove me to get involved in PHEAL, or Planning for Health Equity, Advocacy, and Leadership. Founded in March 2020 by Miguel Vázquez, a healthy communities planner in Riverside, California, the organization has pulled together a national network of about 80 health officials, community leaders, planners, architects, educators, and others dedicated to advancing health equity. The onomatopoeia of the acronym was intentionally created to highlight an empathetic, community-oriented approach. It calls for planners to feel, not just execute, their work.

'Health disparities are a planning issue, and planners need to take a more active role in addressing them.'

—ALENA FIRESTONE

PHEAL's Guiding Principles (stateofplace.co/pheal-principles) offer a comprehensive roadmap to health-oriented planning under three large umbrellas: community health and regeneration, community-based advocacy, and healing through leadership. The principles aim to serve as a blueprint to center health equity in planning and community development.

We're also discussing how to encourage the adoption of these principles in planning curricula. With Jaime Fearer, AICP, health impact policy and practice analyst at Washington, DC's department of health, and Dr. Mariela Alfonzo, the CEO of State of Place, an urban design data and predictive analytics software company, I'm helping to create an education and mentorship subcommittee to explore ways to engage other young and aspiring planners in the effort to advance health equity.

The pandemic has pulled back the curtain on many of the disparities that impact public health. As planners, we must be eager and anxious to address them. It is up to everyone responsible for the well-being of our communities to ensure that the painful lessons of this crisis are not taken for granted—or forgotten.

Alena Firestone is a student member of PHEAL's steering committee and a junior at Temple University, where she is pursuing a bachelor of science in community development with an accelerated master of science in city and regional planning.

ALENA FIRESTONE

Viewpoint is Planning*'s op-ed column. The views expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine or the American Planning Association. Please send column ideas to Lindsay R. Nieman,* Planning*'s associate editor, at lnieman@planning.org.*

Urban greening strategies like adding parks and greenways mitigate heat risk. They also provide the psychological benefits associated with access to nature, like relaxing or napping in the park, as this couple did in Phoenix in June.
JUAN ARREDONDO/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

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HOW-TO

8 STRATEGIES TO BEAT THE (EXTREME) HEAT

To build heat resilience, planners need a diverse portfolio of tactics. *By Ladd Keith, PhD, and Sara Meerow, PhD*

HEAT IS THE deadliest weather-related hazard in the U.S. It kills more people than all other weather hazards combined. It also has detrimental impacts on the economy, energy and water usage, infrastructure and ecosystems, and people's quality of life.

Because of climate change, higher temperatures are impacting communities of all sizes and in all regions. But some neighborhoods are hotter than others, including districts with a history of redlining or communities of mostly low-income residents or residents of color. Certain populations are also more vulnerable to heat-related illness or death, including children and the elderly, people with chronic health conditions, people experiencing homelessness, and people who are institutionalized.

As temperatures continue to climb, cities must prepare for unprecedented heat and address these systemic inequities. To achieve equitable heat resilience, planners will need to develop a diverse portfolio of strategies.

Tactics, which fall into two categories—heat mitigation and heat management—should be prioritized to maximize co-benefits, minimize tradeoffs, and avoid maladaptive strategies that provide short-term relief but worsen the problem in the long run (e.g., highly inefficient air conditioners that increase electricity demand and greenhouse gas emissions).

With that in mind, here are a few ideas, four from each category, to get you started.

Heat mitigation

When it comes to heat mitigation, the aim is to cool cities, neighborhoods, and heat-vulnerable locations. This can be accomplished through land-use planning, urban design, urban greening, and waste-heat reduction strategies that lessen the built environment's contribution to urban heat.

Because of their systemic nature, heat-mitigation strategies will likely need to be implemented across a variety of community plans, so it is important for planners to coordinate and integrate all plans and policies to advance the community's vision and goals for heat resilience.

1. GO LARGE-SCALE with land-use planning. Because the built environment affects local climates, broader efforts such as conserving natural areas, developing ventilation corridors, arranging urban geometry (e.g., the dimensions and spacing between buildings), and reducing heat-trapping surfaces associated with transportation systems can be very effective.

2. TAKE ADVANTAGE of small-scale design opportunities. Site-level design interventions like orienting buildings and streets for shade, adding shade structures, and using cool pavements, walls, and roofs can impact microclimates and affect heat at a human scale.

3. INCREASE VEGETATION. Greening tactics like urban forestry; green stormwater infrastructure; and green roofs, parks, and greenways help cool surrounding areas through evapotranspiration and by providing shade.

4. REDUCE WASTE heat. Increasing building energy efficiency through weatherization and the use of "cool" surfaces, as well as decreasing vehicle use by encouraging transit and active transportation modes, will decrease both waste heat and greenhouse gas emissions.

Heat management

Whereas heat mitigation aims to lower temperatures and prevent future extreme-heat events from occurring, heat management is all about preparing for and responding when an extreme-heat event takes place. These types of strategies will require effective coordination across levels of government and among various disciplines and sectors, such as public health, emergency management, and the energy sector.

> Reducing individual exposure to dangerous levels of heat may require changes in public infrastructure.

1. INCREASE ACCESS to indoor cooling. Regulations and assistance programs should be considered to help make cooling accessible and affordable to all. Energy-grid resilience is critical here because electricity use to support indoor cooling increases during extreme heat events, making "brownouts" and power outages especially dangerous.

2. REDUCE EXPOSURE to dangerous levels of heat. This may require changes in the operation of public infrastructure (e.g., transit stops and hiking trails) and facilities (e.g., playgrounds), as well as in regulations for indoor and outdoor worker safety.

3. BUILD PUBLIC awareness. As heat risks increase, it is important to work with public-health professionals to educate and inform the public about the dangers of heat and how to avoid them.

4. CREATE A heat action plan. Communities' emergency management systems must be prepared for unprecedented extreme-heat events, including early-warning systems, plans for coordinated responses, and designated cooling centers and resilience hubs where people can go for shelter and assistance.

Ladd Keith is an assistant professor at the School of Landscape Architecture and Planning, University of Arizona, and Sara Meerow is an assistant professor at the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, Arizona State University. They are the authors of "Urban Heat Resilience," the PAS QuickNotes from which this article is adapted, and an upcoming PAS report on the same topic, slated for publication in 2022.

LEGAL LESSONS

A NEW LEGAL LANDSCAPE FOR BILLBOARD REGULATIONS

The Supreme Court will once again take up constitutional issues surrounding signs. *By Daniel R. Mandelker*

Rules for billboards and on-premise signs are complicated by free-speech law.

ANDRIY BLOKHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

OGDEN NASH GOT it right in his famous poem when he said, "I think that I shall never see / A billboard lovely as a tree." We all know billboards as large, tall, unattractive signs, usually out of place in our cities and on our highways. Because of that, many cities and towns heavily regulate or outright ban them.

Historically, courts have upheld billboard bans, but free-speech law has created new complications. Now, the Supreme Court is once again taking up free-speech issues in *City of Austin v. Reagan National Advertising of Texas*. An amicus brief filed by APA argues that, regardless of its decision for either party, the Court has an opportunity to clarify sign regulations and make planners' day-to-day jobs easier. But there might be an even easier approach: Regulate billboards and on-premise signs the same way.

The old standards

Before 1976, when the U.S. Supreme Court held the free-speech clause applied to commercial speech, state courts almost always upheld sign ordinances that banned billboards. All state courts accepted traffic-safety reasons for a ban, since most studies show that billboards cause driver distraction that contributes to traffic accidents. Nearly all courts accepted aesthetic reasons. Sign ordinances that banned billboards usually allowed on-premise commercial signs. State courts upheld this different treatment, even though on-premise commercial signs can be just as unattractive aesthetically as commercial billboards.

A 1976 decision by the Court changed all of that. Because of it, free-speech law is now the legal doctrine that decides when sign ordinances are constitutional. State law is no longer enough.

The major question is the level of judicial review courts have to provide. Because free-speech law applies, sign ordinances are put through a more demanding process of judicial review than ever before.

In the 1981 decision in *Metromedia v. City of San Diego*, the Court applied more demanding judicial review, and a plurality of four Justices held that a sign ordinance that banned commercial billboards did not violate free-speech law. The billboard ban was justified by traffic-safety and aesthetic concerns, and a majority of the Justices agreed on this holding. Free-speech law also requires that an ordinance regulating speech must not be broader than necessary. The San Diego ban met this requirement. If billboards are a traffic hazard and unattractive, the plurality of Justices held, "then obviously the most direct and perhaps the only effective approach to solving the problems they create is to exclude them." They concluded that "[i]t is not speculative to recognize that billboards by their very nature, wherever located and however constructed, can be perceived as an 'aesthetic harm.'"

The Justices then considered a common exception that allowed on-premise, but not off-premise, billboard signs to display commercial speech. They held that allowing on-premise commercial signs but prohibiting billboards did not denigrate the city's interest in traffic safety and beauty. Neither did it defeat the city's aesthetic case. Billboards, with their "periodically changing content," presented a more acute problem than on-premise signs, and the ordinance reflected the city's decision that its interest in on-premise advertising was stronger than its interest in traffic safety and aesthetics.

In 2015, the Court created new complications with a new free-speech case, *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*. It applied

an even more demanding, strict-scrutiny judicial review, and held a sign ordinance unconstitutional because it treated noncommercial signs differently from other signs based on their content. The Court did not discuss billboards or the *Metromedia* case, so we don't know whether strict scrutiny applies to a sign ordinance that regulates commercial speech on billboards. If it does, that would be a major change in the law. Sign ordinances that regulate commercial speech, such as billboard bans, would have to avoid regulating content. For example, a sign ordinance could not allow a billboard that said, "Save the Whales." If that were the case, strict-scrutiny judicial review would apply and the sign ordinance could be held unconstitutional.

Takeaway for planners

This question is not settled, and definitions in sign ordinances are potential troublemakers for cities. That problem occurs with the usual definition of on-premise commercial signs as signs that display goods and services available on the premises. Courts have held this definition unconstitutional, and later this year the Supreme Court will consider the constitutional problems raised by the distinction between billboards and on-premise signs in *City of Austin v. Reagan National Advertising of Texas*.

In lieu of clarification, planners can avoid these problems if they adopt a new strategy for regulating signs: Reject the typical sign-ordinance format based on billboards and on-premise commercial signs. Instead, adopt size, height, location, distance, and other regulations that apply to all signs. The ordinance will then avoid definitions that create free-speech problems.

Daniel R. Mandelker is Stamper Professor of Law at Washington University.

Chicago's Large Lots Program fulfills both personal and community goals on the city's South and West sides, areas with high vacancy and decades of disinvestment.

JAPA TAKEAWAY

A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR VACANT PUBLIC LAND

For communities with limited resources, ownership-based vacant-property greening programs have a lot to offer. *By Alessandro Rigolon, Debolina Banerjee, Paul Gobster, Sara Hadavi, and William Stewart*

THE RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE of neatly maintained homes on tree-lined streets figures highly in the American imagination. Such neighborhoods command high property values and have strong quality-of-life indicators.

But in many postindustrial U.S. cities, neighborhoods like this are a distant memory. Decades of systemic disinvestment and racism have led to depopulation, blight, and high land vacancy. For cities, this creates significant maintenance costs and decreased tax revenues, while residents face a dissolving social fabric, higher crime rates, and declining health outcomes.

Planners have responded to these issues with programs to green or repurpose publicly owned vacant land. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, vacant lots are "cleaned and greened" through lease agreements with the city or nonprofits retaining ownership. While these efforts have provided a range of municipal and resident benefits, they require constant investment and oversight.

Our recent article, "Transferring Vacant Lots to Private Ownership Improves Care and Empowers Residents: Evidence from Chicago," in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, examines a different approach to greening vacant lots—returning vacant public land to resident ownership.

If you are a planner looking to solve your community's urban vacancy problem on a tight budget, you'll definitely want to keep reading.

Private-ownership model

Programs that transfer vacant public land to private ownership have several advantages for cities. In addition to

USDA FOREST SERVICE

greening lots, they put property back on the tax rolls and shift maintenance to new owners. While critics argue that such initiatives can spur land speculation, checks and balances can ensure benefits favor long-time neighborhood residents. For example, a program can restrict vacant-land sales to nearby property owners or require residents to maintain their prospective lot for two years before purchasing it.

Our research focused on Chicago's Large Lots Program, which transfers city-owned vacant lots to property owners on the city's South and West sides, areas characterized by high vacancy, large shares of low-income Black residents, and decades of disinvestment.

Managed by Chicago's Department of Planning and Development, the program began transferring lots in early 2015, with successive annual rounds of sales through 2019. Property owners can purchase one or two city-owned vacant residential lots on their block or an adjacent block for $1 each.

New owners must maintain the lot, pay property taxes, fence the lot if not directly side-adjacent to their property, and hold onto the property for five years to limit speculation. Building on Large Lots parcels is allowed, but most owners have maintained them as private or shared space with gardens, trees, and use areas.

Findings and policy implications

The data behind Chicago's Large Lots program has important implications for planners and policy makers grappling with urban vacancy:

OWNERSHIP IMPROVES vacant-lot condition and care, and sustains it over time. Large Lots exhibited a significant increase in condition-care in the first year after purchase. Improvements continued over the next four years. During this same time, unsold city-owned lots saw a slight decline in condition-care.

The continued improvement shows promise that the program will be sustainable over the years. The findings support the inclusion of side-yard programs in medium-term planning efforts seeking to revitalize marginalized communities.

OWNERS NEEDN'T live on the block for the program to be effective. The Large Lots Program sells vacant land to property owners who do and don't live on the block. Condition-care was similar for both. Planners working on vacant land in other jurisdictions could evaluate residents' needs when defining eligibility criteria for ownership-based vacant-lot programs.

OWNERSHIP EMPOWERS local communities to encourage desirable and limit undesirable behaviors. Participants in focus groups stated that owning Large Lots gave them control over vacant land to deter illicit and dangerous behaviors like fly dumping, driving cars through vacant lots, and drug dealing. Conversely, ownership promoted positive behaviors through neighborhood gatherings, play spaces for children, and vegetable gardens.

OWNERSHIP FOSTERS an ethic of care. Residents also mentioned that, through ownership, they were able to express an ethic of care for their lots to beautify and create tranquil places. This ethic of care extended beyond their lots, with visible change and outdoor activities communicating broader positive neighborhood transformation.

This suggests side-yard programs empower lot owners to become catalysts for broader community changes. Cities can enhance these positive intentions by providing financial incentives and educational resources for resident-owners to create community-oriented spaces on their vacant lots.

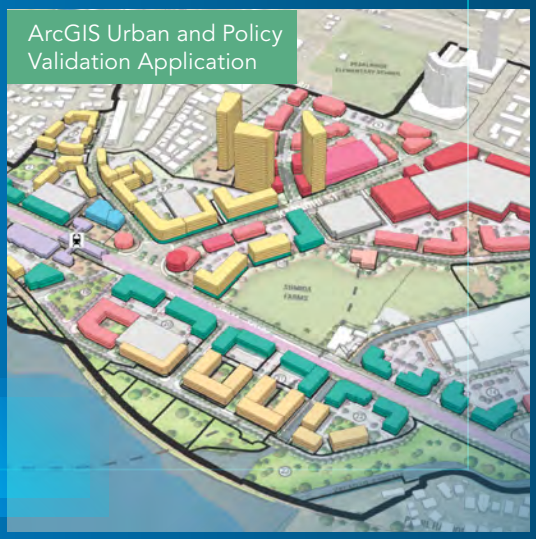
OWNERSHIP PROMOTES family legacy. Residents reported that vacant-lot ownership through the Large Lots Program enabled them to continue a tradition of land tenure in their communities. Although other families abandoned the neighborhood, those who stayed behind were purposeful about their attachment to their neighborhood and were committed to their local family history. To enhance family legacy in majority-Black neighborhoods, planners working on side-yard programs where lots receive multiple applications could consider prioritizing sales to property owners who have lived in the neighborhood for several years.

Final thoughts

Vacant-lot greening programs that transfer public land to private ownership can be part of the urban vacancy solution. These programs might be particularly appealing for planners because they require few resources to implement and can be self-sustaining. Initiatives like the Large Lots Program also hold potential to empower marginalized people to see themselves at the center of neighborhood transformation.

Alessandro Rigolon is an assistant professor and Debolina Banerjee is a PhD candidate, both in the Department of City & Metropolitan Planning at the University of Utah. Paul Gobster is a senior research landscape architect in the Northern Research Station of the USDA Forest Service. Sara Hadavi is an assistant professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning at Kansas State University. William Stewart is a professor in the Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

ArcGIS Urban and Policy Validation Application



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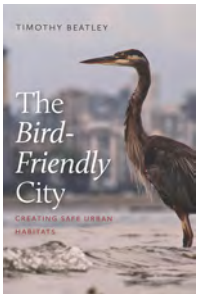
BIRDS HELP ECONOMIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH SING

How cities can become bird-friendly habitats. *By Lindsay Nieman*



The Bird-Friendly City: Creating Safe Urban Habitats
By Timothy Beatley, 2020, Island Press, 272 pp.; $35 paper, $34.99 e-book.

ABOUT 40 PERCENT of the world's 11,000 bird species are in decline, says BirdLife International's 2018 State of the World's Birds report. The new book *The Bird-Friendly City: Creating Safe Urban Habitats* looks at the causes—habitat loss, climate change—and how cities across the world are addressing them. *Planning* caught up with author Tim Beatley, Teresa Heinz Professor of Sustainable Communities in the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning, School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, to learn how helping our feathered friends helps humans, too. This has been edited for length and clarity; read the whole interview at planning.org/planning.


TIMOTHY BEATLEY

Q&A

***PLANNING:* Does birdlife improve our cities?**
BEATLEY: I'm frequently saying that what's good for birds will be good for humans. Planting more trees, for example, benefits birds, but it also mitigates the impacts of extreme heat. We know listening to birds helps calm us, reduces stress, and enhances happiness. The mental health benefits alone suggest that there are few things cities can do that would deliver a greater return.

We also know the market system responds positively to birds. A study by researchers at Texas A&M found a positive relationship between bird diversity and abundance and home prices—again, not surprising, though for these researchers, birds were seen as a proxy for a range of underlying ecological conditions that support birds. There's also considerable evidence from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studies showing the billions of dollars in expenditures resulting from nature- and bird-tourism. The pandemic has likely put a dent in that, but there are birding festivals all around the country, and they will undoubtedly return.

***PLANNING:* How can we protect birds, especially during migration?**
BEATLEY: An important step is to adopt mandatory bird-safe design standards that require fritted glass and bird-safe window treatments in new buildings. The Toronto Green Standard requires a density pattern of about 2 inches by 2 inches, which has been effective in preventing bird strikes.

Lights-out campaigns are also crucial during peak periods of migration, like in the fall. More than 30 cities now run such programs. And dark-sky lighting ordinances and efforts to curtail use of pesticides and herbicides help birds and other wildlife, too.

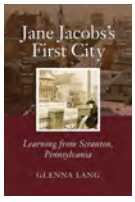
But we need to go beyond simply reducing threats. We need to proactively plan with birds in mind and work to protect and expand their habitats. A casual review of comprehensive plans finds little mention of birdlife. Planners should account for wildlife in their plans as an essential element in creating our vibrant future cities.

Land-use planning should do a better job with ecological connectivity, too. Some cities have been using circuit theory to understand where physical barriers and ecological disconnects prevent birds (and other animals) from easily moving through the city.

This is really part and parcel of the larger vision of a multispecies city: We should want to live in places where we share space and actively work to coexist with many other species.

Lindsay Nieman is Planning*'s associate editor.*

COURTESY TIM BEATLEY



Jane Jacobs's First City: Learning from Scranton, Pennsylvania
By Glenna Lang, 2021, New Village Press, 468 pp.; $39.95 hardcover, e-book.

"THE MODERATE SIZE of the city allowed worlds to intersect easily through chance encounters," writes author Glenna Lang in her new, painstakingly detailed account of Jane Jacobs's early life in the middle-sized city of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

There, Jacobs watched the city become overly dependent on its anthracite coal deposits; she saw stagnation and decline. But those years also helped generate her skepticism about megacities like New York City and Toronto. It's no accident she later championed "entirely new things being introduced into the economy by people who have been excluded in the past."

In a Scranton-sized city, argue both Lang and Jacobs, "Just two public high schools could accommodate all students seeking this level of education. Thus, these institutions brought together children citywide from a multitude of backgrounds and neighborhoods."

Lang's account acknowledges the shaky status of present-day Scranton and leaves readers to consider just how middle-sized cities can survive and prosper on their own terms, when local enterprises of all kinds are forced out of business by national and international conglomerates. Nor do they have to be big businesses; the coal-mining process on which Scranton depended literally undermined and destroyed houses on the surface.

'Lang's account leaves readers to consider just how middle-sized cities can survive and prosper on their own terms, when local enterprises of all kinds are forced out of business.'

Lang concludes that "Scranton gave Jane a lens through which to view all urban places."

But can that be true? In small and mid-sized cities in the 21st century, can anyone afford to downzone that field just outside the city limits? Can ambitious, questing young people resist the opportunities beckoning in larger cities? Where would we be if Jane had done so?

Harold Henderson is Planning*'s book reviewer. Send new books and news of forthcoming publications to him at 1355 W. Springville Road, LaPorte, IN 46350; email librarytraveler@gmail.com.*

RISE ABOVE

REFRAMING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

From cost-benefit analyses to 'climate ambassadors,' cities are coming together to transcend a polarizing issue.

By BRIAN BARTH

This page: In Iowa City, Iowa, climate ambassadors went door-to-door with conservation kits, creating an opportunity for conversations among neighbors. Opposite: Solar farms in North Carolina provide tax revenues for jurisdictions otherwise unlikely to champion renewables.

NICK ROHLMAN; CHARLES HARRIS/ DUKE ENERGY

IN THE PARTISAN UPHEAVAL OF RECENT YEARS, the existential threats of climate change have taken a back seat to the existential threats besieging democracy. Climate action has surged back as a priority under the current administration, but with a large swath of the nation indifferent, if not opposed, to that agenda, progress at the federal level is uncertain. This uncertainty is intensified by the constant flip-flopping of policy as control of Congress and the White House swings back and forth across the partisan divide. Progress on generational challenges like climate change requires long-term political stability, which fortunately can still be found at the municipal level of American politics.

Chris Rhie, an associate principal and energy specialist at the consulting firm Buro Happold, believes this trend is unlikely to shift anytime soon. "I remember when the George W. Bush administration stopped the U.S. from joining the Kyoto protocol and it was folks like Mayor Greg Nickels of Seattle and John Hickenlooper, who was mayor of Denver at the time, who took up the mantle," says Rhie. "When the Trump administration, surrounded by a lot of climate deniers, wanted to pull out of another international agreement, city leaders again said, 'Look, if the federal government is not going to take action, we're going to do it ourselves.' It's cyclical."

Public trust in government is greatest at the local level, and the impacts of climate change are by nature local, so it makes sense for cities to take the lead.

Public trust in government is greatest at the local level, and the impacts of climate change are by nature local, so it makes sense for cities to take the lead. "Climate impacts on infrastructure happen at the local level and have to be paid for largely at the local level," says Samantha Harkins, the former deputy mayor of Lansing, Michigan, and the founder of Hundred Place Consulting. "As a resident, you expect to be able to travel on roads that aren't collapsed from inclement weather, and that there's a plan in place for the next time that happens. Local governments are being forced to adapt."

To adapt successfully, however, means navigating the choppy waters of regional, state, and national politics with which municipalities are inextricably bound. Red states, for instance, are increasingly preempting local control in their blue cities on partisan issues like climate change. Two-thirds of major American cities are not on track to achieve their published greenhouse gas emissions goals, according to "Pledges and Progress," a 2020 Brookings Institution report. Of the findings, Brookings Senior Fellow Mark Muro told the *Washington Post* that, "Having a well-intentioned, well-researched commitment is different from having a plan for execution—that's where cities are struggling."

Montgomery County, Maryland, known for having some of the most ambitious climate goals in the country—including reducing emissions 80 percent in a decade—has made scant progress since 2017, when the target was set. Much of the reductions will have to come from buildings emissions, but the county council has met with stiff resistance from the local building industry. For years, the county sought to establish the Community Choice Aggregation Pilot Program (a novel initiative in which the government pools the electricity demand of its residents to enable increased adoption of renewable energy), but it required approval by the state senate, which was not forthcoming until May of this year, despite the body being controlled by Democrats.

In 2019, the town of Brookline, Massachusetts, passed a controversial ordinance banning natural gas as a heating source in new construction, a major win for climate advocates that was blocked by the state attorney general under pressure from the oil and gas industry and real estate developers. A similar measure became a sticking point during negotiations on an omnibus climate bill under consideration by the state legislature in 2020. It was omitted when the legislation passed in March this year, kicking the issue down the road to be decided by the state's newly formed "Future of Heat Commission"—yet another bureaucratic deflection in the eyes of activists, who point to the quickly ticking clock of the climate crisis.

Local news is full of these climate casualties. And those working behind the scenes on such negotiations have many other stories to tell. One

climate planning consultant describes an effort to establish a greenhouse gas reduction pledge by the regional council of governments in a major metropolis that was "completely derailed by a climate denier who was on the board. The executive director said we could probably get the pledge through, but 'It's going to be a fight and I don't want to spend the political capital.' " The consultant says this "dynamic between urban-core cities and more conservative outer-belt cities" is not uncommon when regional planning authorities attempt to push through climate initiatives. "You have to be tactical about how you do it," he says.

Reframe or rebrand

One tactic is to simply reframe the issue. "I worked on a project once where they said sustainability sounds too expensive," says Rhie. "So I said, okay, fine; let's call it 'high performance.' That was the rebrand."

Highlighting bottom-line benefits can also be an effective tactic, says Rhie. In North Carolina, a national leader in the rollout of solar energy, adoption has been aided by the cash gushing into the coffers of rural jurisdictions that would otherwise be unlikely to champion renewables. Why? Solar farms dramatically improve the value of the land beneath them and lead to increased property tax revenues. A study by the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association found that parcels with utility-scale solar installations paid an average of 458 percent more in taxes the year after the installation.

Harkins agrees that this sort of rebranding of climate initiatives is essential in many corners of the country. She has spent much of her career lobbying the Republican-controlled Michigan legislature on behalf of local governments. When it comes to funding climate initiatives, "Hackles are raised around whether this is a service local government should provide. The conservative argument is, 'Why on earth should we be doing that? Let private business do it.'"

The most effective response? Frame it as a public safety issue, says Harkins. "The messaging is that we have to do this to ensure we have safe infrastructure, to ensure that we're protecting our citizens, to ensure that we're prepared the next time we have a weather event. I think that's a pretty effective counterpoint to arguments about local governments stepping out of their lane."

This is not to say that rhetorical tactics alone have the power to produce some sort of instant climate kumbaya. For Eric Wojchik, AICP, a planning analyst at Minnesota's Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, the regional MPO, they are merely an outward representation of the long slog of climate coalition-building.

The Metropolitan Council includes 188 jurisdictions that cover semi-rural well-and-septic districts, high-density downtowns, and everything in between, with an accompanying range of political climates. Unlike most MPOs, the Metropolitan Council owns and operates a wide range of infrastructure, including a transit system, a park system, and a wastewater treatment system. These systems are being impacted by the changing climate, giving the organization significant skin in the game.

"Warming winters have been our biggest climate issue," says Wojchik. "Normally in Minnesota we go into the deep freeze and we stay in there until March. Now we have a situation where we're hovering above and below freezing," which local infrastructure was not designed for. "It's going to wreak havoc on our roads and pipes."

While there's no requirement for the 188 jurisdictions to engage in any sort of climate action, they are required to submit a comprehensive plan for the council's approval every 10 years. Wojchik says they are very careful to avoid using the approval process to impose anything that would be locally unpopular.

Where there is likely to be pushback on climate initiatives, they use more subtle tactics instead. For starters, they supply technical assistance throughout the phases of plan development, trusting that good information will lead to good decisions. And they often partner with locally respected stakeholders, such as academic institutions or nonprofits, to help lubricate the process.

"This has to be approached sensitively in certain communities," says Wojchik. "What we've learned is that it's not always best if those resources are coming just from us. Sometimes it's much more comfortable to approach

JASON SCHNEIDER

FURTHER IMPACTS:
POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

Public trust in the federal government is declining, while trust in local governments remains high. Local governments and planning organizations should continue to foster that trust by listening to their community members; focusing on local goals, visions, and needs; and building confidence in their work through implementation of projects and initiatives.

Trusted partners can help explain climate action benefits. Sharing the fiscal benefits of tree canopy programs city-to-city in Minnesota convinced a community not to drop its tree program, like this one in Des Moines, Iowa.

RACHEL MUMMEY/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

communities that are new to this work through a trusted partner, as opposed to coming in unilaterally and saying, 'Hey, you guys should think about this.' The messenger is just as important as the message."

As an example, he cites a community that wanted to do away with their tree canopy program because they thought it was too costly. Unfortunately, according the Metropolitan Council's extreme heat map, "they were actually quite a hotspot," says Wojchik. "But the city council wasn't interested in that aspect."

The MPO had data demonstrating the fiscal benefits of more trees, from stormwater infiltration to property values, but they let an intermediary serve as messenger. In this case, it was not a civic institution but a nearby community with a similar demographic, infrastructural, and political profile that had decided to invest in its urban canopy based on the dollars-and-cents argument.

"It worked," says Wojchik. "They were quite keen to keep their tree canopy program going because they could see the value in it from a similar type of community. We were able to

connect those two communities together to share information, which has been a profoundly effective approach."

Neighbor to neighbor

Some cities are taking climate coalition-building to another level by cultivating teams of resident "ambassadors" to spread the message grassroots-style. Flagstaff, Arizona, has three full-time staff working on climate issues. After the city passed a climate plan in 2018, Jenny Niemann, a climate and energy specialist in the city's sustainability office, said they "realized off the bat that we will never get anywhere on climate action with just our staff. To make the changes that are necessary, we need advocates across the community." More than 100 people have taken part in the city's climate ambassador training since it began in 2019. Another 30 have completed the more in-depth "climate leader" program, an eight-week course.

Graduates of the latter are encouraged to take on community service projects related to climate change, but the core purpose of both is to empower residents to have transformative conversations about climate change with friends, family, coworkers, and community members. Ambassadors are trained to answer tough questions, like "Hasn't the climate changed before?" "Will the plan increase regulations or taxes?" and "Why do we need a plan?" The course provides fact sheets for dispelling common myths—"Climate models are unreliable," for example. Exercises include role-playing games modeled after the "Six Americas" approach to climate communication. This Yale initiative is based on research showing that there are six types of audiences in the climate conversation: alarmed, concerned, cautious, disengaged, doubtful, and dismissive. Ambassadors learn strategies for communicating with each.

But most importantly, says Niemann, the focus of the program is on how to forge a human connection around the topic. "We talk to participants about the science behind climate change, but then we actually tell them, 'Don't talk about that.' We say: 'Think about something you have in common with the person.' Do they have grandkids? Then talk about that. Or, 'Oh, you're

PREPARING TO THRIVE

This past year, *Planning* has been covering the long-term trends and emerging issues identified by APA's Foresight work (planning.org/foresight). Stay tuned as this critical Foresight practice continues into 2022 and strives to prepare planners for an uncertain future.

IN THIS ISSUE:

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES
Rise Above: Reframing the Political Climate of Climate Change

CIVIC TECH
All-in Community Budgets

PLANNING TOOLS
VR Success in Texas Transportation

E-COMMERCE
Not Your Typical Warehouse Hubs

PREVIOUS ISSUES:

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
Smart City Digital Twins

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
A Move to Local Food Systems

CLIMATE CHANGE
Where Will Climate Migrants Go?

DIGITALIZATION OF LIFE
Ghosts in the Office

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Data Centers at the Edge

DATA USE *Fort Worth's Data-Driven Planning Play*

DEMOGRAPHICS
Why Can't We Plan for Aging?

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING
The Price of Racial Inequality

ENERGY SYSTEMS *Charging Ahead*

GOVERNMENT TECH & CYBERSECURITY
5 Tips to Safeguard Your Data (and Your Community)

HOUSING
Here Comes the Neighborhood

PUBLIC REALM *Spaces for All*

SMART CITIES *Ahead of the Curb*

THE SHARING ECONOMY
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a fisherman too?' Then maybe talk about how climate change has impacted a local fishing hole. Because there's always a danger that conversations about climate change can get too negative and paralyzing. We want to really focus on shared values."

Climate ambassador programs are popping up across the country, in communities from Austin, Texas, to Boston to Silicon Valley. In Iowa City Iowa, climate ambassadors spearheaded the city's first "energy blitz" this spring, going door-to-door to hand out 1,300 energy saving kits with LED bulbs and "furnace whistles" (devices that alert homeowners when their air filter needs changing, thus maintaining peak operating efficiency). It was also an opportunity to have conversations among neighbors.

> In Flagstaff, Arizona, climate ambassadors were out there working their magic on the streets, on social media, and calling into city council meetings.

Sarah Gardner, AICP, Iowa City's climate action engagement specialist, believes it would be next to impossible to meet the targets set out in the city's climate action plan without those conversations. "To meet our goals, we estimate we will need to retrofit about 90 percent of our building stock," she says. "Technically, the government could come in and say, 'You're going to retrofit this building, and you're going to like it.' But we're not going to do that."

Gardner estimates that only five percent of emissions in Iowa City come from sources directly controlled by the city, such as light bulbs in street lamps and heating and cooling municipal buildings. "In order to have real success with climate action, we've got to address the 95 percent of emissions that aren't directly under our control, so it's critical to figure out how to articulate the issue to the community and engage them to voluntarily do that work," she says. "Climate plans are a little unique in the planning ecosystem," Gardner adds. "It's different than a transportation plan where much of what we would need to do, like conducting engineering studies and arranging the capital investment, is under control of city hall."

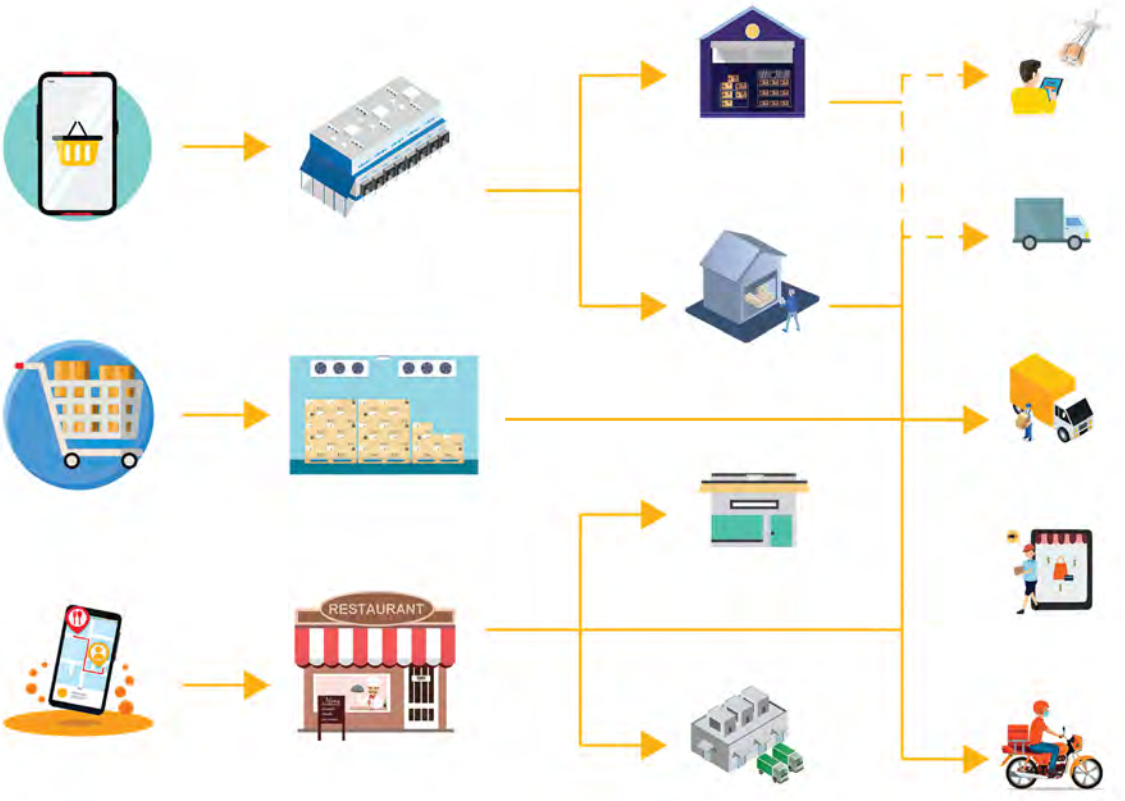
The climate conversation varies according to each city's circumstances. In Flagstaff, it has centered on bread-and-butter planning issues like zoning and density—highly divisive, though not necessarily along partisan lines. As the city's climate plan was being drafted, an apartment boom had spawned an intense NIMBY backlash. This became embroiled with the plan, which advocated for density as a means to reduce vehicle use.

"We were having some pretty toxic conversations in the community about this," says Niemann. "Frankly, it was a lot of our environmental activists that were the ones pushing back against density. They're maybe more used to talking about things like forest protection and here we come in talking about taller buildings." Thus the ambassadors are trained to talk about density versus sprawl, and tactics minimizing the impacts of infill development. "Ultimately, these are conversations about community change," says Niemann.

This year, Flagstaff passed a carbon neutrality plan, which, like the 2018 climate plan, faced stiff headwinds. The business community felt that it left too much regulatory uncertainty. Housing and poverty activists felt that some provisions could amplify the city's already soaring rents. It's impossible to say how much of an impact the ambassadors had on tempering the pushback, but they were out there, working their magic on the streets and social media and calling into city council meetings.

What is that magic, exactly? Niemann points to a quote that facilitators use to set the tone of ambassador trainings. It's from Katharine Hayhoe, whose TED Talk about how to have an effective conversation with climate deniers has been viewed nearly four million times: "The best advice for anyone who wants to engage with others on climate action is to start in our own communities. Begin with people who share your values and open your heart. Communicate why you care so passionately about this issue and why you think they might, too, because of the same values."

Barth is a freelance journalist with a background in urban planning.



Not Your Typical Warehouse

By ALISON FELIX, AICP, *and* TRAVIS POLLACK, AICP

BELLINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS, a suburb about 30 miles from Boston, has become a warehouse hub. Dunkin' Brands, Best Buy, Snyder's Snacks, and others operate out of large industrial buildings, with delivery trucks coming and going regularly.

But a new warehouse facility in a wooded corner of the town is different. Its trucks aren't headed to retail stores. Instead, waves of blue vans with those ubiquitous Amazon smiles are loaded with packages to be delivered directly to doorsteps. The facility is a "last-mile" e-commerce delivery center, with traffic patterns very different from the other warehouses nearby.

E-commerce is a $750 billion industry in the U. S., comprising 13.6 percent of total retail sales Ten years ago, that number was around four percent. The dramatic increase in online buying and selling doesn't just impact the brick-and-mortar stores. It's also fueling an unprecedented transformation of the industrial warehouse marketplace and having major effects on land use, transportation, air quality, and equity.

As e-commerce explodes, the traditional delivery model—factory, distributor, retail store, buyer—is being upended. The new online model requires more complex supply chain logistics, including multiple levels of inventory management and a variety of modes for the picking, packing, and shipping of online orders.

Consumers expect to receive the goods they purchase within a few days (or hours), and retailers like Amazon, Walmart, and Target are competing to tighten fulfillment times even more. Pressure to maintain dependable, rapid delivery has resulted in networks of last-mile delivery centers close to suburban and urban neighborhoods. Amazon, which controls approximately 40 percent of the e-commerce marketplace, is leading the push to build these facilities, which have become integral to the delivery process.

The colossal and rapid expansion of the e-commerce industry shows no signs of slowing. That means regional delivery networks also will proliferate, so planners need to consider

the impacts of last-mile delivery centers.

To help think through these issues, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), greater Boston's regional planning agency, talked to Boston-area planners from nine municipalities and, in February 2021, released *Hidden and in Plain Sight: Impacts of E-Commerce in Massachusetts.* The report zeroes in on the impacts of e-commerce in our state, but the lessons and recommendations are applicable wherever planners and municipal officials are noticing new traffic patterns from delivery trucks, facing new demand for warehouse space, or trying to referee the fight for curb space.

Breaking the mold

Before 2014, there were no Amazon warehouses in Massachusetts. Now, there are 34 active and future facilities. In the 12 months it took to research and write *Hidden and in Plain Sight*, Amazon's footprint in Massachusetts doubled from 10 operational facilities to 20. And the approach varies by municipality. In Dedham, Amazon leases space in an existing warehouse (and wants to expand). A warehouse built on speculation in Bellingham sat empty for several years until Amazon arrived. Worcester's vacant mall is slated to become a delivery center, and in Revere, an abandoned candy factory and multiplex cinema were repurposed as last-mile delivery centers.

Last-mile delivery centers are noticeably different from traditional warehouses, with facilities operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A typical "day" begins in the middle of the night, as tractor-trailers bring packages in bulk from fulfillment centers. Orders are sorted, prepped, and loaded into delivery vans. Each morning, employees drive to the facilities, park, and load themselves into the readied delivery vans. With their routes to customers' homes planned, they usually enter and leave the warehouse outside of peak traffic hours, with delivery departure times often scheduled in waves. If demand is especially high, some companies also contract with third-party delivery-service partners or use on-call drivers who make deliveries using their personal vehicles. In a typical facility, tractor-trailers, delivery vans, and on-call drivers can generate an enormous amount of activity.

FURTHER IMPACTS:
E-COMMERCE

Demand for brick-and-mortar retail space is decreasing, meaning smaller multiplier effects from retail sales in local economies.

Complicating matters, e-commerce facilities are locating near residential areas to shrink delivery times. That can add another level of noise and traffic conflicts. That is the case in Dedham (pop. 25,000). Amazon came to town in 2015, and the company recently requested to expand from its 90,000-square-foot facility to the entire 230,000-square-foot industrial site.

"The planning board, back in 2015, didn't quite grasp all the explosive growth that was going to come," notes Dedham's planning director, Jeremy Rosenberger. "This was a use unlike we've ever seen." The planning board is currently working on these issues with Amazon and is expected to propose recommendations by year's end.

Economic benefits

As with any proposed business, the costs of e-commerce facilities, such as traffic, must be weighed against economic benefits. Delivery centers can generate significant property tax revenue, and in Massachusetts, some warehouses are revitalizing previously unused properties. "We had two industrial parks that were heading south and Amazon has revived both of them," says Bob O'Brien, director of economic development for Revere. "We think both of those sites would have been vacant without them."

There are other economic wins. All the planners we talked to require Amazon delivery vans to be registered locally to ensure collection of vehicle excise taxes. Facilities also provide local jobs—an important consideration as the U.S. recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic—although transportation and warehousing jobs typically pay lower wages than other industrial uses like wholesale trade, manufacturing, and construction. Indeed, employee issues like low wages and worker treatment have arisen.

Some e-commerce companies do invest in communities where they have a large footprint. This spring, Amazon announced a $300 million commitment in the form of below-market loans and grants to create 3,000 new affordable homes near public transit in Washington State's Puget Sound area; Arlington, Virginia; and Nashville, Tennessee—all locations where Amazon has or expects to have at least 5,000 employees.

JASON SCHNEIDER

14 ACTIONABLE STEPS TO TAKE WHEN E-COMMERCE CENTERS COME TO TOWN

Integrating warehouse and distribution centers requires deliberate design, mitigation, and management, especially near higher density residential areas. Here are actions to take whenever an e-commerce warehouse or distribution center is proposed.

1. Conduct traffic impact studies.
2. Generate trip forecasting data.
3. Undertake a comprehensive site plan review and approval process.
4. Negotiate traffic mitigation agreements.
5. Create truck and van restriction zones.
6. Prohibit off-site parking of delivery vehicles.
7. Implement a traffic demand management program.
8. Establish rules for where and when to refuel.
9. Require delivery vehicles to be registered in the same municipality as the facility to capture excise taxes.
10. Ensure appropriate signage on delivery vehicles and the facility.
11. Ban on- and off-site idling for facility-related vehicles.
12. Require insurance and background checks for the facility's truck and van drivers.
13. Be informed of truck- and van-driver protocols like training, discipline, and incident (e.g., speeding) management procedures.
14. Monitor the facility post-occupancy and take corrective actions as needed.

SOURCE: *HIDDEN AND IN PLAIN SIGHT: IMPACTS OF E-COMMERCE IN MASSACHUSETTS (BIT.LY/3MCRJCZ)*

Altogether, Amazon plans to preserve or build more than 20,000 affordable housing units in the U.S. through its Housing Equity Fund.

Planning considerations

So, what do planners need to be thinking about to manage the proliferation of e-commerce delivery centers in their communities already, as well as thoughtfully plan for the future?

The first is the effect on other industries and economic development. Many delivery centers are located in areas zoned for manufacturing or industrial use, resulting in a high demand for that type of real estate. According to Cushman & Wakefield, the demand for industrial space in North America in 2019 exceeded supply for the first time since before the Great Recession. As the private sector works to meet this demand, planners must evaluate if the rapid expansion of e-commerce will overtake other industrial uses that may offer higher paying jobs, and decide whether to rezone areas to direct or prevent the development of e-commerce facilities.

Trip generation is very different. The novelty of the last-mile operations model means traditional trip generation forecasting methods do not apply. The ITE's *Trip Generation Manual*, the go-to guide for estimating traffic patterns, does not include a land-use type that directly applies to last-mile delivery centers. Instead, planners should look for recent traffic data from similar e-commerce facilities as part of site-plan review and conduct traffic counts once facilities are operational to determine actual traffic patterns.

Air quality can suffer. Adding more vehicles (and the vehicle miles traveled by each) means more emissions. Planners should think about how to mitigate the air quality impacts from that influx, and especially consider whether already vulnerable groups suffer disproportionally from those impacts, as some scholars suggest. Although Amazon has pledged to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2040, it also reported that its emissions rose 19 percent in 2020.

California's South Coast Air Quality Management District has already taken steps to lower greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality. Last spring, it approved the Warehouse Indirect Source Rule, which targets emissions from the trucks that service warehouses, not the warehouses themselves. The rule relies on a points-based system in which warehouse operators choose from a menu of mitigation options, like using trucks fueled by electricity or natural gas, installing charging stations or rooftop solar panels, putting air filters in nearby schools and child-care centers, or paying a mitigation fee.

What's next?

The explosion of e-commerce facilities is projected to continue. According to a recent report from CBRE Group, e-commerce will account for 26 percent of all retail sales in the U.S. by 2025. To keep pace, an additional 330 million square feet of distribution space will be needed.

But there's still a lot we don't know, so we are developing an online playbook to help municipalities implement development standards and review facility proposals through a lens of equity, sustainability, and municipal finance. We are also tracking technological innovations that will likely continue to disrupt e-commerce. Many companies are exploring the use of drones and autonomous vehicle deliveries. New twists on the old-fashioned bicycle could serve as nimble, carbon-neutral, last-mile delivery solutions.

Jeremy Rosenberger, the Dedham planner, said it best: "Who knows what else they're going to come up with that we're not even aware of and aren't able to plan for?"

Alison Felix, AICP, (afelix@mapc.org) is a principal planner with MAPC, and Travis Pollack, AICP, (tpollack@mapc.org) is a senior transportation planner with MAPC. They coauthored the 2021 report, "Hidden and in Plain Sight: Impacts of E-Commerce in Massachusetts."

Top row: Demonstrating the use of the HoloLens in Fort Davis, Texas; a local leader walks through design alternatives; a 3D intersection rendering in Marfa, Texas. Bottom row: Another intersection, and a resident with the VR projection on the wall behind.

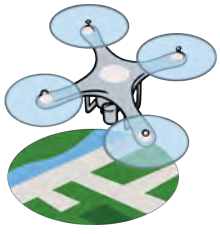
Transportation Planning's Crystal Ball

By LINDSAY NIEMAN

LONG ONE OF the fastest-growing states, Texas could see its population nearly double by 2050, putting intense pressure on infrastructure already struggling to safely move residents, tourists, and goods.

A local stretch of U.S. 67, the national highway that starts near the Mexican border in Presidio, Texas, and runs all the way north through Iowa, is already feeling that pressure. A surge in tourism, freight traffic, and economic activity is already resulting in more traffic—and more collisions, injuries, and fatalities.

To improve safety along the corridor, the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) El Paso District brought in engineering firm CDM Smith. Their task: Create a long-range, community-driven master plan for a 142-mile stretch of the highway, which winds through a variety of communities and landscapes.



FURTHER IMPACTS:
PLANNING TOOLS

Plenty of other tech developments are poised to change planning practice. Drone technology already is allowing for reliable surveying and real-time mapping of cities.

Q&A

While the plan's goals are familiar—increased safety, sustainability, and pedestrian and cycling access—CDM Smith took an innovative road to reach them. The project team supplemented traditional engagement tactics like public meetings with mixed-reality technology, which allows users to experience a blend of virtual and physical spaces simultaneously. The addition was instrumental in prioritizing residents' feedback.

"Mixed reality was essential in presenting the proposed improvements as if they were being built," says Robby Guthart, AICP, CDM Smith's lead transportation planner for the *U.S. 67 Corridor Master Plan*. "Without spending money to build anything, and without having to be physically outside in traffic, stakeholders and the public were able to experience virtually three or four different design options and provide their input."

COURTESY CDM SMITH; ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER

Planning spoke with Guthart to learn more about the project—and how mixed-reality technology can help communities take a more active role in planning their future. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

***PLANNING:* What was the overall aim of the master plan?**
GUTHART: From the onset, we focused on short-, mid-, and long-term potential projects that could be implemented by the communities and TxDOT to help resolve safety issues and improve mobility. The study closely aligned with TxDOT's goal to end all fatalities on Texas roadways by 2050.

***PLANNING:* How was virtual technology brought into the process?**
GUTHART: Stakeholder and public engagement were essential in achieving the project goals, and the application of mixed reality helped them inform the proposed improvements. We used a program called Infraworks to depict design alternatives in 3D, then imported them into Microsoft HoloLens, an immersive mixed-reality technology, so users could experience the designs at a real-world scale within the mixed-reality environment.

***PLANNING:* What was the impact?**
GUTHART: It helped us translate otherwise complex ideas that the public could see, literally walk through, and react to, which was especially useful in building public understanding. For the design process, it assisted in refining conceptual safety and mobility improvements. For the community engagement process, it educated the public, helped them provide more informed feedback, and ultimately resulted in more buy-in from the public, stakeholders, and local elected officials.

ROBBY GUTHART, AICP

***PLANNING:* Did using this technology make the planning process more inclusive?**
GUTHART: Initially, the HoloLens got the public excited about the project. It served as a tool to attract the attention of community residents and draw in strong attendance and participation at public outreach activities. Plus, using the HoloLens, residents and stakeholders were able to walk through 3D holographic models of intersection design alternatives that were projected onto the public meeting floor. Without spending any money to build anything, and without being physically at the site of the proposed improvement, residents could experience the project and easily provide their feedback. And they didn't need a background in planning or engineering to comprehend it. Instead of using traditional visualizations like cross-sections that can be challenging for the public to translate, this tool just literally mirrored the real world, with the proposed improvements added in. Overall, it democratized high-level concepts by turning them into visuals that transcend language and age.

***PLANNING:* What role can mixed-reality tools play in transportation planning, especially in areas anticipating significant growth?**
GUTHART: This tech provides the opportunity for transportation planners to effectively communicate and refine multiple alternatives, both through design and public feedback. Plus, mixed reality provides the data to make the right investment decisions.

***PLANNING:* We're in a time of rapid change. How do you think this tool can help us prepare for what's ahead?**
GUTHART: Overall, it helps planners model a variety of alternate futures. It can test how transportation improvements might withstand disruptions, or serve as a useful scenario-planning tool to help communities plan improvements and adaptation measures that better withstand the impacts of climate change. And with adequate outreach strategies, mixed reality can be seamlessly incorporated into planning efforts to ensure more inclusive conveyance of information with socially, economically, and culturally diverse communities.

***PLANNING:* Why should the planning field embrace mixed reality?**
GUTHART: It's an effective and useful tool for multiple aspects of planning: refinement of conceptual recommendations; communication of improvements to residents; more informed public feedback; and better modeling of alternative futures, scenarios, disruptions, and disasters. The list goes on.

***PLANNING:* Do you have any tips for pulling mixed reality into the planning process, especially in communities with limited budgets?**
GUTHART: Consider incorporating it early on in the public involvement process. Demonstrate the technology and proposed improvements to key community leaders and those leading the planning effort first, then achieve buy-in for the new technology during outreach. While the upfront costs of mixed-reality hardware can be steep—the HoloLens starts at around $3,500—they are far more affordable than the cost of investing in the wrong improvement.

Lindsay Nieman is Planning*'s associate editor.*

COURTESY ROBBY GUTHART

A More Inclusive and Engaged Budgeting Process

By JAKE BLUMGART

MICHELLE STEPHENS has had two front-row seats to the pandemic-fueled revolution in public participation. First, she's head of planning practice at Bang the Table, a company that provides communities across the country with a variety of tools to orchestrate public engagement. Stephens is also on the planning commission in Lafayette, Colorado, a small municipality between Boulder and Denver.

In the Denver area, as in much of the country, lockdowns and social distancing requirements forced public meetings to go online. But the pandemic has also opened up civic engagement in unexpected ways, allowing that critical aspect of community planning to blossom over the last year and a half. Decision makers are hearing new voices and ideas when it comes to planning and budgeting—and they're engaging differently, too, thanks in part to some innovative solutions in civic tech.

Making (digital) space

Connecting with a broad, representative swath of community members has long been a struggle, which means resources often fail to make it to the people who need them the most. According to 2019 research from Boston University, in-person neighborhood meeting participants in that region tended to be older, whiter, and wealthier than the average resident—and that group has successfully wielded its influence to delay change, like attempting to block affordable housing construction, for instance. Researchers there found that the disparities between meeting attendees and everyone else are even more vast than those between voters and nonvoters. Stephens can relate, having seen the older, affluent, squeaky-wheel stereotype in public meetings before. But online engagement offers a powerful shift.

FURTHER IMPACTS:
CIVIC TECH

Wearable tech is maturing, with most products related to health, finance, and communication. Through monitoring and location-based services, data from wearables can provide insights on local activity patterns.

"We're seeing a downward trend in the age of people attending local government meetings, like participatory budgeting workshops with city councils," she says. "We're starting to see under-45 crowds show up, instead of mostly people who are retired or those who are very passionate in one way or the other."

This change in who is attending meetings during the pandemic has been evident in Denver, where policy makers are using Bang the Table and other tools to give residents a voice in how to spend American Rescue Plan Act funds. In a series of digital town halls, residents could vote on policy goals in three categories: community, business, and infrastructure. The poll, run in conjunction with the meetings, asked participants to prioritize values that related to each of those recovery areas. Then a more in-depth survey allowed them to provide deeper feedback about why they wanted to prioritize, say, housing or mental health in the "community" category.

JASON SCHNEIDER

MORE CIVIC TECH OPTIONS

These engagement platforms offer tools that can help meet a variety of community needs.

A BALANCING ACT: Models budgets, collects resident input, provides tax estimates, and shows participants how funds are spent.

CITIZEN LAB: Offers open source surveys, participatory budgets, and idea collection.

SOCIAL PINPOINT: Provides customizable info pages, forums, mapping, budgeting, surveying, and more.

PUBLIC INPUT: Manages resident relationships with communications and database tools.

THE HIVE: Facilitates participatory budgeting, mapping, virtual reality, surveying, and more.

To try to avoid the pitfalls of the digital divide, the city also pushed engagement via texts and phone calls, contacting 120,000 residents in lower-income communities to encourage participation and ensure people knew about the events. About 6,200 of those people remained on the call for longer than 10 minutes. Callers could then press zero to speak with an operator and provide comments to the larger meeting.

Meanwhile, polls were also available via text message.

This isn't participatory budgeting in the classic sense, where a small pot of money is set aside for direct spending based upon community preferences. Instead, the engagement campaign was meant to ensure policy makers understand the priorities of residents, and the recovery areas that matter most to them, when it comes to the hundreds of millions in federal rescue funds Denver received.

"I was a little nervous going into the outreach efforts, and I really worried about whether or not we would have diverse voices show up," says Kiki Turner, deputy director of public affairs at Denver's Department of Finance. Historically, she says, white residents have been heavily overrepresented at in-person meetings.

To Turner's surprise, the demographic makeup of participants "almost exactly matched Denver's demographics," she says. "Digital outreach eliminates some of the barriers that our more vulnerable residents face to civic engagement, whether it's childcare or timing or transportation to events."

Turner also says these outreach events didn't dissolve into acrimony, as is so often the case at in-person public meetings. Instead, planners were surprised by how vulnerable attendees were. At one telephone town hall, she recalls, the first resident who called in said she wanted to ensure stimulus funds were allocated to mental health care. Her son recently died by suicide, a tragedy she believed was due to a loss of support structures during the pandemic.

One of the municipal employees on the call suffered a suicide in his family as well, and he shared his story. It resulted in valuable discussions on the topic, with other people calling in to talk about their experiences of suicide and mental health crises in their families. Turner says mental health support is "a top priority" for funding in the wake of the town halls (although an exact allocation of the rescue money hasn't been decided yet).

"We saw people being really vulnerable and candid during this community outreach phase," says Turner. "People were really eager to tell their stories and to connect with each other," and with city staff.

Next steps

Building upon the success of this effort, Denver will take its experiments with new forms of community outreach during the pandemic into a formal participatory budgeting framework this fall. The feedback sessions regarding CARES Act funding priorities were meant to give planners and other policy makers a sense of how the public wanted money to be spent, but it was not required that they follow community guidance exactly.

Now the city has allocated $1.7 million in capital funds that will be spent on projects approved by a series of community votes, much like the forums held about the recovery funds. Community stakeholder groups will begin by considering capital proposals, and voting will commence later this year.

Bang the Table's Stephens says Denver is not alone in using new technology-based forms of engagement popularized by the pandemic. And there are other civic tech solutions on the market that suit a variety of community sizes, types, and needs.

"This has brought budgeting into the hands of people who are not typically in the process," says Stephens. "[The pandemic] made it so government agencies became aware of the importance of a digital-first approach."

Jake Blumgart is a senior staff writer at Governing *magazine. He lives in Philadelphia.*

Emory Campbell at the Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park, which features recreated Gullah buildings and cultural artifacts. Campbell, 80, has lived his entire life on Hilton Head Island and is co-owner of Gullah Heritage Trail Tours.

Almost Lost

From land to language, a planning effort on Hilton Head Island seeks to preserve the vanishing culture and history of its native Gullah Geechee residents—and build a better future.

By PHILIP WALKER, FAICP
Photographs by BAILEY DAVIDSON

As Victoria Smalls's car raced across the bridge connecting Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, to the rest of the world, apprehension filled her mind. She was on her way to a public meeting—the first in a nascent planning process close to her heart.

Despite waking that morning with a great sense of purpose and pride to be assisting in the process of listening and learning from the island's native Gullah Geechee residents, she was also anxious.

Born just to the north on St. Helena Island in a close-knit Gullah Geechee community, Smalls spent her teen years living on Hilton Head Island but moved away for college. Would the native islanders remember her and embrace her as a community member? Or would they view her with suspicion because of her role on a planning team hired by the town?

Smalls, a specialist in Gullah history and culture who, at the time, worked as program manager for the International African American Museum, has since been hired as the executive director of the national Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. She was the consultant team's point person for cultural preservation.

Her wariness was understandable. While multiple plans for Hilton Head had been prepared over the years, this would be the first focused specifically on the Gullah community since the town incorporated in 1983. Distrust of development had been building since the 1950s, when the first bridge to mainland South Carolina was constructed. Prior to that, the Gullah—whose ancestors were brought to the region as enslaved people from Africa's West Coast in the 1700s—made up 100 percent of the island's population. The Gullah had owned and farmed the land there since just after the Civil War.

Today, that community accounts for just six percent of Hilton Head Island's 40,000 residents. And because of continued development, various public policies, difficulty establishing land ownership, and economic limitations, Gullah history, language, and culture are at risk of disappearing.

"We're frustrated, and it's been going on for 50 or 60 years. The growth has overwhelmed us," says David White, a local Gullah resident.

In response, the town established the Gullah-Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force in 2017 as an ad hoc committee to the planning commission. As then-Mayor David Bennett stated, "We need to figure out how to help the Gullah people be economically sustainable."

The task force identified three major focus areas for the project that, if addressed, could help resolve the challenges faced by the local Gullah community: cultural preservation, public policy surrounding land development and ownership,

From top: The Karl Bowers Bridge onto Hilton Head Island; a scene from nearby Skull Creek; Victoria Smalls, who is Gullah and the planning team's cultural liaison.

COURTESY VICTORIA SMALLS

and the deep history of properties passed on through generations without clear title. The town hired a three-person consultant team—of which Smalls and the author of this article were members—to carry out the ambitious planning process, which included extensive public engagement with Gullah residents, coordinated by Jayme Lopko, AICP, Hilton Head's senior planner.

The resulting plan, approved in September 2017 and currently being implemented, underscores a broad range of planning work—from cultural preservation to revisioning a complex zoning ordinance—that offers planners an equally wide breadth of lessons and insights.

Balancing act

Hilton Head Island is most known for its thriving tourism, beach resorts, golf courses, and gated communities. However, as Gullah resident David White said at one of the numerous public engagement activities, "The history of Hilton Head did not start with a nine-hole golf course."

West Africans were brought there because of their knowledge of rice cultivation and general ability to cope with heat, humidity, and tropical diseases. They lived there in relative isolation; even the plantation owners' overseers, referred to as "rice drivers," were Gullah. Aside from Union soldiers stationed there during the Civil War (which prompted the white plantation owners to abandon their lands), the Gullah dominated the island's social fabric for centuries.

Historically, the Gullah people occupied the coastal lands and barrier islands along the southeastern coast of the U.S. Today, most reside in an area that extends roughly from Wilmington, North Carolina, to St. Augustine, Florida, and are concentrated in Georgia and South Carolina.

A turning point for the Gullah of Hilton Head occurred when investors purchased 20,000 acres of land for a logging operation, followed by construction of the first bridge to the island from Bluffton, South Carolina. Not long after, came developers, who kicked off a trend that slowly transformed it from a natural setting occupied by generations of Gullah to a hot spot for affluent white people and their resorts, golf courses, and gated communities. Gullah traditions faded into the background—but weren't totally erased.

"We have history here, but we have camouflaged it," says Emory Campbell, who manages Gullah Heritage Trail Tours and was born and raised on the island.

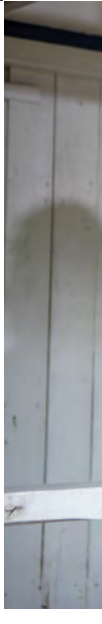
While the remaining Gullah residents collectively own more than 1,000 acres of land, much of it is environmentally or economically constrained, making their traditional farming and

fishing livelihoods and cultural activities untenable. Ownership is also clouded by property title issues, which limit their ability to sell or develop their land. Complicating matters, most Gullah residents work in low-paying jobs. Many reside in trailers served by septic systems; sewer hookup fees are often cost-prohibitive, although the town is working to reverse that. With limited economic opportunities, they often struggle to pay property taxes, which puts them at risk of losing their land altogether. There is also the negative impact of non-Gullah development—like gated communities—that hampers access to historic cemeteries.

The combination of these circumstances made the project extremely complex. "The community [was] seeking to achieve a balancing act," says Craig Richardson, director of the North Carolina office of Clarion Associates and the consultant team's third member. Richardson was the original author of Hilton Head's Land Management Ordinance (LMO), which was adopted in 2014.

The resulting plan had to juggle multiple and equally important objectives: protecting the natural environment, protecting the desired character of the Hilton Head community, respecting Gullah history and traditions, and providing economic opportunities to Gullah landowners by providing more development flexibility and potential.

PHILIP WALKER (LEFT)



Cultural preservation

Because of the island's isolation from the mainland prior to the mid-20th century, the Gullah's West African culture remained intact. Sweetgrass basket weaving, quilting, and knitting fishing nets are a few of the cultural crafts passed down generationally, along with folklore, stories, and songs. Crabbing is another cultural activity, as is cooking traditional, Low Country recipes like Hoppin' John, sweet potato pie, and benne wafers.

Their communities are often referred to as "Geechee," which Smalls says was a derogatory term when she was growing up, used to belittle African American people who spoke differently—in this case, an English-based creole language, also called Gullah. Smalls recalls first noticing around age nine how people would laugh at how she spoke. Feeling ashamed, she worked hard to change her speech. By the time she left for college, her Gullah accent was gone. Her story isn't unique within the Gullah community.

"Our language is almost lost, and when people who know it are gone, the language will be gone," says Louise Cohen, a native Gullah islander. Through education and cultural events like the annual Gullah Celebration, they hope to turn that around. "[Involvement in the] Gullah Celebration is what got me over the shame of speaking the Gullah language," she adds. The event inspired her to step out of her "shell of shame" and become a Gullah storyteller. She founded the Gullah Museum of Hilton Head Island in 2003.

Based on Cohen's and other community members' input, the project consultant team proposed more than a dozen cultural preservation

Above: Many of the Gullah community live in trailer homes on their property as development options for their land is restricted. Right: Louise Cohen, director of the Gullah Museum of Hilton Head Island, on the porch of the William Simmons house, a typical Gullah farm community home built in 1930. The house became the museum in 2011.

Sheryse Grant DuBose, a planner and Gullah, at Squire Pope Community Park, where she is working to begin an open-air market for Gullah small entrepreneurs. DuBose was hired as the town's historic neighborhoods preservation administrator, to work with Gullah landowners and implement the plan's recommendations.

strategies, including education on traditional Gullah ways, preserving and exhibiting Gullah sites, tourism and marketing around Gullah culture, and ensuring the space and support to sell and display Gullah arts and crafts.

Public policy

Because the Gullah culture is based in part on agriculture, land is crucial to their identity. "Land is a sacred matter to many Gullah people because the land has been passed down generationally as ancestral land and represents freedom, self-sufficiency, and self-determination," says Smalls.

After slavery ended, the Gullah on Hilton Head were given an opportunity to purchase land, but over time, development pressures and prohibitive policies resulted in substantial restrictions on land uses and loss of Gullah land altogether. For example, a ban on firing guns within town limits prevents hunting, while licensing requirements preclude roadside vegetable stands.

"A lot of us lose land because we can't afford to pay the taxes," says White. Adjusting land-use policies could help, many say. "Buffers and setbacks must be eased. They eat up all the property on small lots," another Gullah resident, Curtis Barnwell, stated in a focus group meeting.

"Our community is different and doesn't fit into the same box as the rest of the island," says Alex Brown, the only Gullah person on the town council. He's concerned that too much information is required for development applications, often requiring the hiring of an attorney, which many cannot afford.

With that in mind, most of the plan's public policy strategies are tied to land development, with the intent to give Gullah property owners more options for their land—whether they want to preserve it, develop it, or sell it.

Because land-use and development policies cannot legally be tied to one's ethnicity and culture, the consultant team proposed an overlay zoning district for historically Gullah neighborhoods. Most of those areas are not very developed and lack cohesive design, so the overlay designation is based on current and historical habitation patterns. The planning commission recently approved the overlay district, and the town council is now studying it for approval, which residents and the consulting team hope will happen soon.

The overlay district will allow higher densities for some of the residential zoning districts, which could increase land value. The council also is poised to adopt the recommended "family compound" provisions, which avoid triggering the full range of subdivision requirements and instead allow multiple housing units on a single parcel. However, because of pushback over the fact that non-Gullah property owners might benefit from the loosened regulations, the town is now exploring ways to limit those benefits to people and their heirs whose ownership dates back to 1956, when the first bridge to the mainland was constructed, or earlier.

To make development and use of smaller properties more viable, the overlay reduces some setback, buffer, and open-space requirements and allows narrower widths, as needed, for required road rights of way and easements. To preserve Gullah property ownership and financial benefits, the overlay also will include transfer of development rights. A program to purchase development rights from willing Gullah property owners is intended to avoid too much development in Gullah neighborhoods and preserve

'THE BATTLE FOR BLACK LAND'

Earlier this year, the BET Network's series hosted by Soledad O'Brien released "Disrupt and Dismantle." Episode 3: The Battle for Black Land," focused on the Gullah people's struggles on Hilton Head Island and shed light on the planning project.

WATCH

https://bet.us/3xKsNwr

their land ownership while still allowing land owners to benefit financially.

The designation of the overlay district would also provide a vehicle for the town to amend its existing corridor overlay design guidelines with respect to their treatment within the neighborhoods. Rather than conveying the character of a beach resort community with extensive building setbacks and landscaping—the only current option—development would be more in keeping with the character of historic Gullah neighborhoods, which includes frame dwellings with clapboard siding, front porches, metal roofs, bold paint colors, and no formal landscaping.

In addition to the overlay, the plan recommends establishing a fund to help Gullah property owners avoid losing their land to delinquent tax sales. It also recommends educating Gullah residents on a range of public policy issues that impact their lives, including land use and development, heirs' property, and property taxation.

Heirs' property

As in many African American communities throughout the South, Gullah property is often passed down from generation to generation. As a result, many Gullah people lack a title and, consequently, cannot sell or get a loan to improve it.

There are clearly no easy remedies to this thorny problem. Multiple regional and national organizations focus solely on this topic, including the Charleston-based Center for Heirs' Property Preservation (CHPP). But even when remedies or partial remedies do exist, the process tends to require a great deal of work for property owners.

"It needed to be in there just to remind people of the issue and to figure out how best to tackle it specifically for Hilton Head Island," says Sheryse Grant DuBose, PhD, who is the town's historic neighborhoods preservation administrator in charge of the plan's implementation. With strong planning credentials, Gullah heritage, and island roots, DuBose is well positioned as the liaison between the town and Gullah community, including helping to interpret the many complexities of the Land Management Ordinance.

Proposed strategies include: using the Heritage Library Foundation, a nonprofit member library offering services in researching ancestry and documenting the history of Hilton Head Island, to help Gullah families research their family history; leveraging a range of local, state, and national organizations involved with addressing heirs' property issues; and encouraging the CHPP to open a satellite office in Beaufort County, South Carolina, to make its resources more readily available to the island's Gullah community. Since this recommendation, the Foundation opened the Heritage Library Genealogy Clinic at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, which will create genealogies for Gullah families to take to the CHPP or their private attorneys as the first step in tackling heirs' property challenges.

Broader implications

Despite Smalls's initial concerns about how she would be received the morning of that first public meeting, she needn't have worried. Upon entering the public meeting, she was welcomed by some Gullah residents she knew—and many she didn't. "Working on this project filled me with a great deal of pride that I could assist my people with their voices being heard by town officials," says Smalls.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed plan implementation, DuBose says they're making progress and "have pretty much worked directly off the plan's recommendations, which we've reviewed forward and backwards."

When it comes to lessons learned, the consultant team says this project drove home for them the fact that even the best process can result in an outcome that does not completely satisfy all parties involved.

Even with extensive public engagement and a dedicated task force guiding the effort, not all Gullah residents are fully behind it. Time will tell if this plan will help the community maintain its vanishing culture. But one thing is certain: When it comes to marginalized communities of color, decades of understandable distrust of local government cannot be reversed overnight.

Philip Walker, FAICP, is the principal of The Walker Collaborative, a planning consulting firm based in Nashville, Tennessee. He served as the project manager for the consultant team that worked on this project for the Town of Hilton Head Island.

This Houston intersection is a popular spot for public demonstrations, but its car-centric design fails to support them.

RAZA KAZIMI VIA FLICKER

SIX WAYS TO PLAN FOR CIVIC ASSEMBLY

How to support and safely manage sociopolitical dissidence through equitable policy, design, and infrastructure. *By* TARANA HAFIZ

TEMPORARY POP-UPS OF bullhorns, posterboards, and ad-hoc soapboxes can signify the power of a sudden, citizen-driven reclamation of public lands. That is often the case where Post Oak Boulevard and Westheimer Road meet, a focal point for Houston's public demonstrations. But because it is one of the busiest intersections in the city—and predominantly car-oriented—protests with as many as 3,000 people are often funneled into just six feet of sidewalk, with little protection from the road.

Public spaces play a vital role in a city's infrastructure. They are our gray areas, serving as interstitial and communal markers. During the pandemic in particular, streets, parks, and plazas have become not only sources of escape, but also places for "aggrieved people to […] express their freedom of speech," says Michael Berkowitz, founder of the nonprofit Resilient Cities Catalyst.

But not all public spaces are built to accommodate these uses. While some U.S. cities are exploring new ways to curate public lands for civic assembly, many have assigned them to recreation and traffic uses, limiting space for demonstrations.

In a proposal for New York City, the Public Space for Free Expression points out that a local "network of civic spaces" are grounds for "sustained community participation and engagement in the everyday." The best design and planning solutions will not only create parks for people-watching and outdoor yoga, but also will nurture efforts to organize residents towards change, build public trust, and cultivate an engaged citizenry. These dual roles of great civic spaces are vital to the socioeconomic health of cities everywhere.

Read on for six ways to ensure that public assembly events are safely supported and managed through policy, design, and funding.

1 DIVERSIFY THE EXPERIENCE to cater to a variety of audiences and neighborhoods. While nationwide city park investment rose to $8 billion in 2019 (a slight increase from previous years, according to CityLab), much of it was allocated to spaces like Klyde Warren Park in Dallas or the Brooklyn waterfront, which prioritize programming dedicated to recreation. The most successfully designed public spaces, however, function both as vital playscapes and sociopolitical epicenters.

Emancipation Park in Houston's Third Ward neighborhood, for example, delivers much-needed respite for a historically underserved community. The 10-acre open space, purchased in 1872 by formerly enslaved people, was transformed in 2013 with refurbished playgrounds and historic buildings, in addition to a new community center and plaza. Through a rigorous co-design process with the community and years of funding advocacy, the park was established as a center for both recreation and social engagement. Most effectively, the park became a community asset for mobilization, as seen in 2020 when activists gathered there to call for drive-through voting.

Extensive planning and engagement are required to understand which places are best suited for marches and demonstrations and how the design can support them. The recently completed Downtown Colorado Springs Parks Master Plan, for example, informed targeted investment for a stage and plaza for civic events at the end of a soon-to-be-created half-mile pedestrian promenade that connects civic buildings.

Tarana Hafiz is a New York City native and Houston-based urban designer/planner with Design Workshop. She specializes in developing equitable communities, addressing issues faced within public spaces, and integrating outreach to garner support for impactful design.

In Washington, D.C., a street mural at 16th Street and Lafayette Park designates the pedestrians-only Black Lives Matter Plaza.

ALLISON C. BAILEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

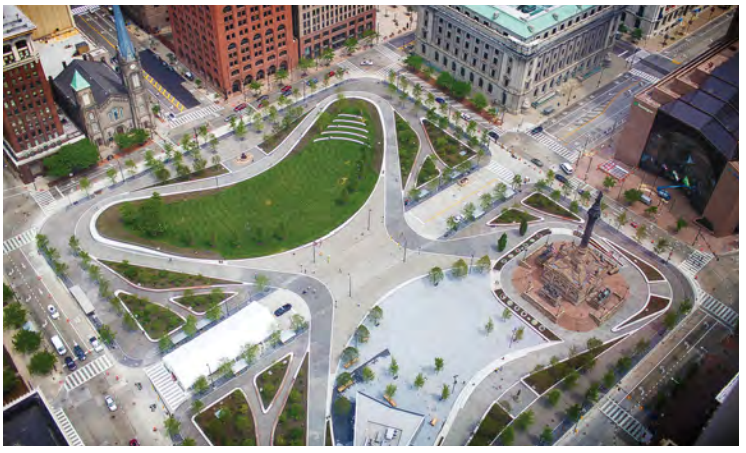
2 MAKE STREETS MULTIFUNCTIONAL. "Take to the streets," we hear. That's because they are signature places for citizens to express their points of view. Research shows that public spaces are key to socioeconomic stability and healthy city operations.

According to a 2014 report from UN-Habitat about the ideal balance of public spaces, parks should account for 15 to 20 percent of a city's total land area, with 30 to 35 percent reserved for streets. Streets can function as public assets that promote access for multiple users when designed with people in mind.

Expanding pedestrian areas along sidewalks or creating interim public plazas along the right of way offer low-cost upgrades through the use of movable furniture, epoxy gravel, or painted concrete. By reclaiming public lands underused by motorists, we can activate spaces for performances, businesses, and social engagement. In addition, designating closures, allocating sidewalk space, and creating smooth detour plans alleviate traffic congestion and potential crashes.

Cities can also encourage planning key corridors as temporary but designated pedestrian-only zones during large, scheduled processions.

Diversity Plaza in New York City's Queens, for example, was redesigned in 2018 to close two blocks to cars and incorporate features like seating, landscaping, and flex spaces for community events throughout the year. As a result, the street "has become Jackson Heights's de facto town square and a proud symbol of Queens as the city's most international borough," says *The New York Times* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman. That makes it attractive to both tourists craving a samosa and locals sitting around debating politics.



Cleveland's public square includes a speakers platform and gathering spaces.

MICHAEL F. MCELROY/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

3 **INTEGRATE SAFETY MEASURES.** Something as simple as an evacuation route indicator can serve as a vital design safety feature for large gatherings that interface with traffic. But building critical mass is a key function of any grand assembly, and keeping huge crowds safe requires holistic site design to minimize potential conflicts.

Creating parks and plazas with easy and open access, free movement of people, appropriately signed routes, good visibility across site lines, and pedestals or steps to vary the user experience are all ways to achieve that. Cleveland's newly designed public square is a good example of a space designed for navigation, safety, reclamation, accommodation, and visibility, with features like a city-sanctioned "speakers platform" and clear site lines.

4 **ENSURE THAT CIVIC** assembly spaces are part of a larger, well-connected system. Making participation accessible is key to fostering relationships between neighborhoods, particularly in areas that have seen less investment in infrastructure and transit.

With that in mind, municipalities should consider where public lands are positioned in the grand scheme of a city's park system. Civic spaces like city halls, squares, and main streets also draw crowds during protests; participants want to go where they can be seen, but they also want convenience.

The 2017 Women's March drew some five million participants across the country, with rallies in several borough parks in New York City alone. Developing holistic open space and transit systems that distribute people to multiple locations and provide multimodal, multifunctional options can help close the loop on access, manage overcrowding, and create a sense of unity and social resilience.

Native Americans protest the Dakota Access Pipeline near the North Dakota state capitol in Bismarck.

ALYSSA SCHUKAR/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

5 **SMALL TOWNS NEED PUBLIC SPACES** that support demonstrations, too. While densely populated areas of the country draw more attention when it comes to large events and marches, gatherings in small towns also amplify local voices and synergize change. The Black Lives Matter movement drew widespread sit-ins and marches across the country in 2020, with more than 1,700 demonstrations in 580 cities, including Saint Clair Park in Greensburg, a small town outside of Pittsburgh with a population of 14,000.

Creative funding streams, design opportunities, and partnerships can help create functional and aesthetic civic grounds in small towns. For more than a decade, Citizens' Institute on Rural Design, a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, has worked in partnership with Project for Public Spaces and local residents, leaders, and designers to transform underutilized spaces into public-realm assets.

6 **SUPPORT AND FUND** a Plaza Program in your community. New York City's Plaza Program, established over a decade ago, has helped produce dozens of public squares. Overall, 55 new plazas were added across the city through cost-effective means. Expansion of Union Square resulted in 74 percent of users preferring the new configuration, with a 2.4 percent decline in traffic volume and 30 percent fewer traffic fatalities, according to the Center for Active Design (CfAD).

Baking equitable access into such a program is crucial. A proposal from the Public Space for Free Expression calls on Mayor Bill de Blasio to further expand the program to create and manage neighborhood plazas in "high-need areas"—with tandem investment in safe, well-maintained infrastructure from the Department of Transportation. The aim is to ensure that all New Yorkers are able to gather peacefully, connect, mobilize around similar issues, and feel a sense of ownership.

THE PLAZA

Orange, *California*

CONSIDERED THE COMMUNITY'S LIVING ROOM, The Plaza has been the focal point of Orange's commercial district since 1880. With a park, ample outdoor dining space, and pedestrian-priority design, it's supported every-day communal use and special events for more than a century. And thanks to adaptive reuse, the surrounding area is one of the most intact historic districts in the community, with a variety of buildings converted into restaurants, boutiques, and other locally owned businesses. Learn more about this Great Place in America at bit.ly/theplazagreatplace.

Every October, Orange hosts the car-free event Treats in the Streets. Kids in costumes, like this cotton candied toddler, collect treats from local merchants on their way to The Plaza, which hosts games, hayrides, and Halloween-themed arts and crafts.

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