THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION FALL 2023

PLANNING

TRANSIT'S POST-PANDEMIC RECKONING

HOW TO CREATE FLEXIBLE, FUTURE-FOCUSED PLANS

#PLANNING INSPIRES THE NEXT GENERATION

PLUS: NEW DATA FOR EQUITABLE PARKS AND MORE

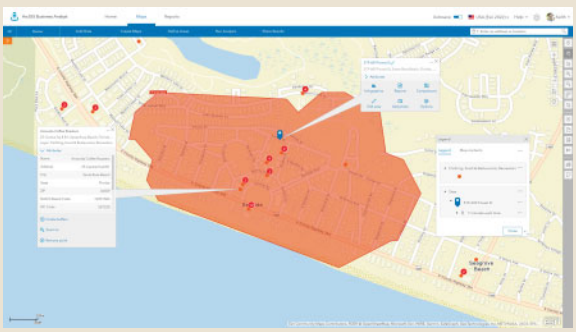
Download Esri's Walkable Community Ebook

What Makes a

Every community will have variations in its response to this question, but here are five core components of a walkable community:

The concept of a walkable community is not new. America's early neighborhoods were designed strictly for that purpose out of necessity. But the exponential growth of automobile use over the last 100 years made walkable communities a lower priority in many neighborhood designs.

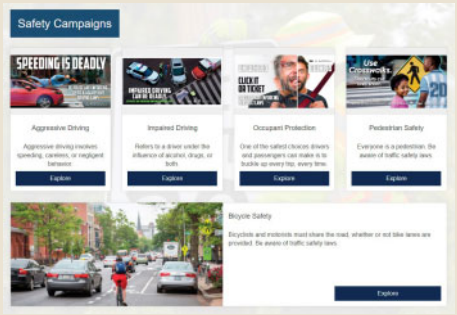
Today, walkable communities are making a strong comeback with public demand and innovative approaches by planners. Since geography is at the core of nearly every facet of planning, geographic information system (GIS) technology has a natural role in the design, development, and analysis of walkable communities.



Economic Mobility

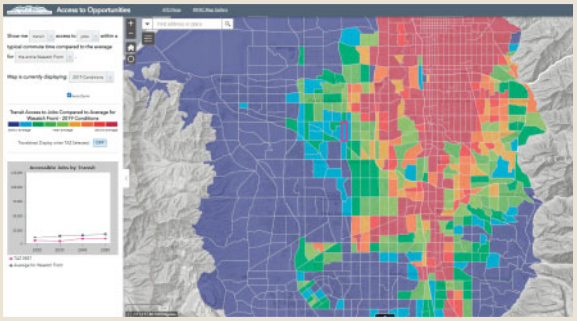
An automobile is not needed for every trip. Residents should have easy mobility through their neighborhoods as well as access to parks, services, grocery stores, schools, health care, jobs, and so forth. A holistic approach to planning walkable communities means actively engaging with economic development organizations (EDOs) and the business community to encourage business retention and growth in these neighborhoods.

Community Walkable?



Safety

Residents of all ages should feel safe from automobile traffic. Feeling safe encourages more outside activity, which, in turn, improves overall health. It also increases sociability, creating a collaborative, close-knit neighborhood.

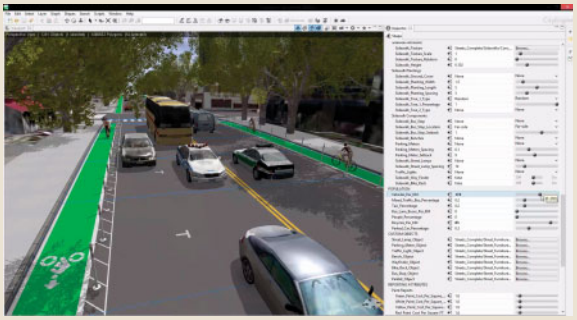


Transportation Accessibility

Easy access to public transit and other transportation options for pedestrians and cyclists should be a priority when designing a walkable neighborhood. This concept is directly tied to economic mobility. Creating a walkable neighborhood minimizes the necessity for automobiles.

People First, Vehicles Second

Pedestrians and bicyclists should be a priority when designing a walkable neighborhood. Well-designed walkable communities mean that access to services, jobs, transit, and more are attainable within reasonable walking or biking distance. Motorized vehicle access does not have to necessarily be removed, but it does need to be relegated in priority to achieve this goal.

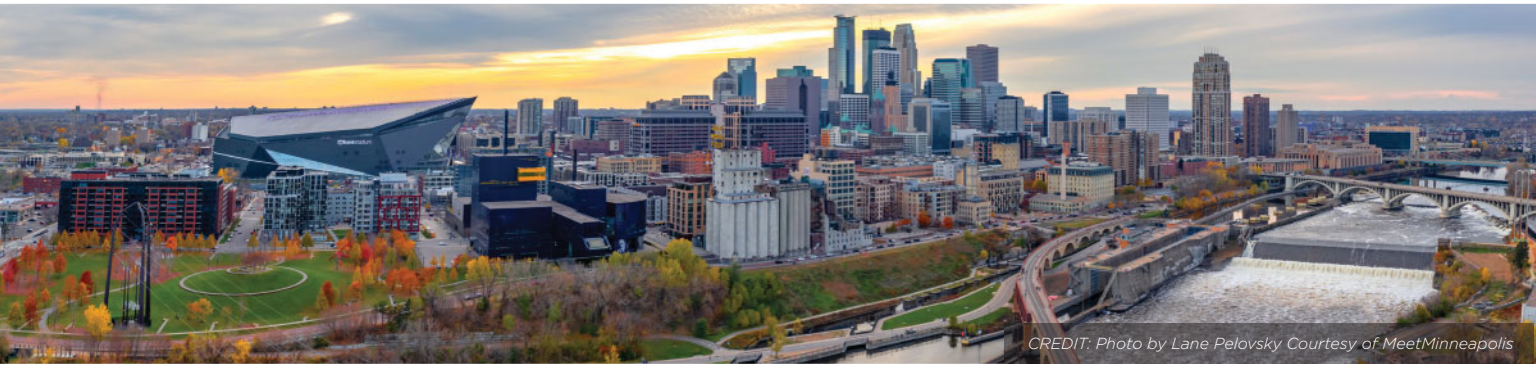


Street Design

New developments and streets (both existing and new) should be designed to accommodate pedestrians comfortably and safely, including creating safer crossings.

See more about the geographic approach to planning at **esri.com/planning**.

esri
THE SCIENCE OF WHERE®



SAVE THE DATE

NPC24

MINNEAPOLIS | APRIL 13-16
ONLINE | MAY 8-10

Where Planners **CONNECT** for

EDUCATION
INSPIRATION
ENGAGEMENT
COMMUNITY

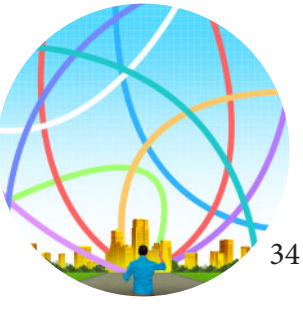
Let's Meet in Minneapolis!

Learn more at **planning.org/npc**

APA

Contents

Fall 2023 | Volume 89 | Number 3



On the cover: A mock funeral for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system.
From top: Social media influencers; embracing flexibility in planning.

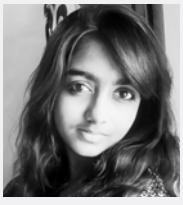
Contributors

Aaron Greiner
Why We Need Queer Urbanism, page 15

This queer urban designer and social entrepreneur is driven to make cities more sustainable, livable, equitable, vibrant, and resilient. "The only way to design *with* communities, and not *to* them, is to meaningfully include people in every step of the process," he says.

Joseph DeAngelis, AICP
Coliving, Conversions, and Corporate Ownership, page 23

This Chicago-based planner and researcher is exploring the future of housing via the tumultuous present. "Coliving and office-to-residential conversions aren't necessarily new concepts," he says, "but the twin crises in housing and commercial office space are certainly forcing the hand of cities and planners to improvise on some older ideas."



Sakshi Udavant
Follow the Next Generation of #urbanplanners, page 40

"It's fascinating to see how technology has enabled every citizen to play an active role in shaping their cities," says this tech journalist who covers digital trends around the world. "People who didn't even know this field existed are now actively working in it, thanks to urban planning initiatives on social media."

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.

Planning Vol 89, No. 3. Planning (ISSN 0001–2610) is published 4 times a year by the American Planning Association, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois, and at additional mailing offices. Planning is a registered trademark.

Attn: Postmaster and subscribers please send change of address to: Planning, Subscription Department, American Planning Association, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601; 312–431–9100. Please supply both old and new addresses. Attn: Canadian Postmaster By Canadian agreement 40033287, Canadian return mail should be addressed to Station A, P.O. Box 54, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J5.

FROM THE DESK OF THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY EXECUTIVE

It Takes a Planner to Turn Potential Into Progress

ONE OF THE reasons I ran for Cuyahoga County executive was to connect our residents to all of the assets and potential I know we have in our community. Potential doesn't mean anything without hard work, but with leadership, vision, and a strong team, I know we can turn that potential into progress.

In 2001, I was the mayoral campaign manager for then-County Commissioner Jane Campbell, who would become Cleveland's 56th and first female mayor. We had a vision for a more connected lakefront with not just pockets of access, but access spanning Cleveland's entire eight-mile stretch of Lake Erie. We laid out a huge map of the Cleveland lakefront across her kitchen table, drawing, moving, envisioning what could be.

After her election, I joined the administration as planning director, and we worked together with Cleveland Lakefront Partners to make a vibrant, accessible waterfront a reality.

It was vital that the Waterfront District Plan would connect the lakefront to everyone, not just a privileged few. We held more than 200 public meetings, design charettes, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations to glean as much input as possible from people living in all of Cleveland's communities. This was the first time the public was engaged so extensively in a plan like this.

Our Waterfront District Plan laid out a vision for eight miles of Cleveland's lakefront, marking the first time in 50 years that the area had been looked at so comprehensively. As the top planner responsible for this massive plan, I and my team remained centered on its goal: to enhance and populate existing lakefront neighborhoods; create vibrant, new lakefront communities; and connect people to the lake. We wanted to shape the lakefront as the most vital element in the transformation of Cleveland as a place to live, work, and play.

'Potential doesn't mean anything without hard work, but with leadership, vision, and a strong team, I know we can turn that potential into progress.'

—CHRIS RONAYNE, CUYAHOGA COUNTY EXECUTIVE

The plan envisioned doing this by protecting the shoreline with new islands made from dredged river sediment, adding new waterfront trails and parks, and creating additional north-south connections to neighborhoods. It was an ambitious plan, with an estimated $1 billion price tag, and while the Waterfront District Plan hasn't been completed exactly as proposed, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested into lakefront projects. Private investments have been multiplied, community partners like the Cleveland Metroparks have taken a more active role, and Lake Erie access has increased for tens of thousands of residents.

Now, as Cuyahoga County executive, I'm still working with partners throughout the region to actualize the potential for the lakefront. While my scope of responsibility now spans many more miles than Cleveland's eight, the goal is the same: open up the shoreline in all of our lakefront communities and stake our claim as the freshwater capital of the world. Across the decades that these ideas have been proposed, discussed, and drafted, we've been able to bring on a host of leaders and elected officials who support better lakefront access. What once started as just two people huddled around a kitchen table has grown to a mountain of advocates in our corner.

Chris Ronayne, an APA member, is the Cuyahoga County executive. He recently spoke in Cleveland to nearly 100 state and local elected officials about planners' value and the outcomes.

EXPLORING THE REALITY OF CAR-FREE COMMUNITIES

A car-free community is a population that relies mostly on public transportation, biking, or walking to commute in and around that particular area. Most commonly, as you can imagine, a car-free community would be located in more of a city or urban area that offers an abundance of alternative transportation options. Metropolitan areas are traditionally more walkable and bikable as well.

But what is the reality of beginning to create car-free communities in more rural areas? And, what are the benefits of such communities?

A car-free community can absolutely become a reality if you find the right space, the right geographic location, and the right mindset of people willing to live there. In early 2023, a project was started in Tempe, Arizona to build a car-free community from the ground up. The idea was founded by tech entreprenuers, who had a vision for mobility rich living without the need for cars. The result is Culdesac, the first car-free community built from scratch in the United States.

This particular community is a real-life example of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) at its core. They evaluated the demands of residents and built around them. As such, Culdesac includes a market, restaurants and small retailers, parks, and co-working spaces, all within a 5-minute walk of the residential buildings. Additionally, all residents of Culdesac receive special savings on Lyft, carsharing, scooter rentals, and the local metro.

Culdesac is the ideal fusion of car-free community living. But not many regions can actually build a community from scratch like this. **What can be done, though, is an evaluation of pockets or areas within a community that have the right attributes to becoming car-light or car-free, and then retrofitting the residential spaces there. Things to take into consideration include:**

- proximity to a nearby city or metropolis with all necessities for living
- safey of walking and biking
- demand of local residents for car-free living
- delivery infrastructure/ability to minimize truck traffic
- local policies/ordinances that need adhered to, such as ADA compliance

While the reality of car-free living may require a lot of planning and resources, the benefits are truly a no-brainer. The elimination of vehicle traffic results in a reduction of air and noise pollution, providing numerous benefits to the environment. It increases safety by mitigating traffic accidents that result in injuries and fatalities – which are both growing in numbers year over year in the United States. And, perhaps not as obvious but equally important, car-free living can be a catalyst for improved mental and personal health by reducing stress, asthma, and other conditions caused by high-vehicle traffic areas.

For planners and policy makers tasked with Transportation Demand Management and considering car-free communities, there is no shortage of hurdles to overcome. From viable spaces to funding and resources, to the mindset of car-addicted residents, this is undoubtedly a huge undertaking. But that shouldn't deter you from trying. If you are within a region that has made a commitment to reducing vehicle traffic, it's worthy of consideration. Start small, with a goal of reducing vehicle traffic by a certain percentage, or simply aim to be car-light versus fully car-free. Any decrease in vehicle traffic and emmisions is a move in the right direction.

For more information about Transportation Demand Management efforts, resources, and all the benefits it can provide, view the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's TDM Action Plan at **www.spcregion.org/tdm.**

PUT YOUR TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT EFFORTS INTO MOTION.

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION
SPC

TDM priorities are different across our 10-county region – but the common thread is that we're all trying to make an impact. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) is bringing it all together, with multiple initiatives already underway. **View SPC's Strategic Action Plan for regional TDM.**

We Love Hearing from You

WHEN I GET A LETTER to the editor, do you know what that says to me? It tells me that people care enough about *Planning* to make the time to write in, and that is a very good feeling, indeed. (It also helps to keep the team on our toes, especially when we've made an oops!) Thanks so much for your engagement. You can send letters to me, Meghan Stromberg, editor in chief, at mstromberg@planning.org or hit us up on social media @APA_Planning, #PlanMag any time. Letters may be edited before publication.

Pollinators, Please

Louisa County is a rural, agricultural county in Central Virginia with robust electrical infrastructure, making it a desired location for utility-scale solar generation facilities. To protect its character, the county adopted a utility-scale solar ordinance strengthened by 32 Conditional Use Permit conditions, including a requirement for pollinator vegetation. One reason Louisa County requires pollinators for large-scale solar is because of the article "Are You Solar Ready," from the March 2020 issue of *Planning*. As an avid *Planning* reader and having married into a farming family, I know how important pollinators are to an agricultural community.

To further protect community identity, the county also capped solar projects at 9,800 acres (about 3 percent) of total acreage, and we are halfway to that mark. Today, an estimated 134 MWAC (megawatt alternative current) are either in operation or under construction, with about 590 MWAC total approved. All new sites include pollinator plants.

Thomas Egeland Jr. AICP, CZA,
LEED Green Associate
Louisa County, Virginia

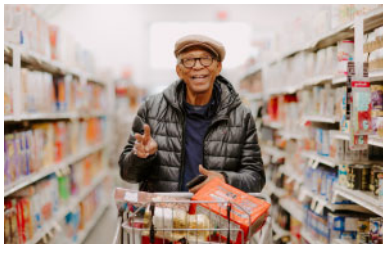
Guarded Enthusiasm for E-bikes

Regarding Alex Brown's article in the Spring 2023 issue of *Planning*, e-bikes can be a valuable contribution to mobility as long as they do not scare bicyclists and pedestrians from using bike lanes and sidewalks. Yes, some drivers will switch from cars to e-bikes. But in my city, many people who formerly pedaled under their own power have now switched to vehicles that look more like motorcycles than bicycles. (I know this because a large percentage of them are not old enough to drive a car yet.)

Many cities are investing in eco-mobility infrastructure to make walking and bicycling attractive and safe for people of all ages and abilities. It would be ironic (and sad) if speeding e-bikes made bike lanes and trails unwelcoming for most ages and abilities. By the way, please tell me the photo on page 12 wasn't of an e-bike motoring down a sidewalk.

Rick Pruetz, FAICP
Hermosa Beach, California

***PLANNING* RESPONDS:** Rick, thanks for this perspective—and for pointing out our mistake: it does appear that the e-bike in the image is on a sidewalk. We regret the error.



Shopping at the Oasis Fresh Market.

Missed Opportunity

While we were excited to see an article featuring food systems planning and project implementation ("Partnerships and Federal Funding Build an Oasis in a Food Desert," by Gary Hamer, Summer 2023), members of APA's Food Systems Division were disappointed that the division was not consulted, mentioned, or linked in the article or email.

The Food Systems Division has a wealth of knowledge in its membership on planning for food access. The article would have benefited from consultation because the field is moving away from the term "food desert" towards "food apartheid" to acknowledge how structural racism, including planning policies, have segregated BIPOC communities from food retail sites.

Molly Riordan
Philadelphia

A pollinator test plot under a Minnesota photovoltaic array.

DENNIS SCHROEDER, NREL/DOE; OASIS FRESH MARKET


APA
Travel the world of learning with Passport
Take a trip through a world built for planners with a subscription to Passport. Start your journey today, and gain unlimited access to APA's extensive online learning library with hundreds of hours of CM-eligible content.
For more information, visit planning.org/passport.
PASSPORT

Amid the growing attention to the tree canopy, Portland, Oregon, is one of more than a dozen cities convening to take advantage of $1.5 billion in federal urban forestry funding and plan climate-resilient urban forests.
MEL WOOD/SHUTTERSTOCK

INTER SECTIONS

WHERE PLANNING AND THE WORLD MEET

Climate | Public Spaces | People Behind the Plans | Et cetera

CLIMATE

Urban Canopies Grow as Key Infrastructure

Six cities unite to create a hands-on program with lessons in how to spend the $1.5 billion available for trees and forests. By Alex Brown

FROM SEATTLE TO Palm Beach, Florida, city leaders agree that urban areas need more trees to alleviate the effects of climate change. Leaders in many communities now consider trees to be critical infrastructure, providing shade, absorbing stormwater runoff, and filtering air pollution. The focus on urban forests has coincided with a growing recognition that low-income neighborhoods and communities of color often have far less tree cover—and suffer increased vulnerability to extreme heat as a result.

When Congress included $1.5 billion for urban forestry in the Inflation Reduction Act last year, the investment came after intensive lobbying from a group of six cities, known collectively as the Vanguard Cities Initiative, whose leaders made the case to federal policy makers that tree canopy could help mitigate climate change's effects.

Now those six cities—Albuquerque, New Mexico; Boulder, Colorado; Chicago; Cleveland; Philadelphia; and Portland, Oregon—have helped to launch a series of learning and information-sharing programs to bring dozens more communities into the fold to maximize the effectiveness of the soon-to-be-disbursed federal money.

Cities prep for an influx of federal funds

In March, the group launched its first of three five-month programs, known as the Urban Nature-based Climate Solutions Accelerator, which will consist of more than a dozen training and collaboration sessions. With a huge boost in federal money on the way, the Vanguard Cities hope the accelerator will become a force multiplier, allowing city officials across the country to learn from one another and from experts on urban canopies, all trying to answer a critical question.

The initial accelerator program will focus on urban heat and how urban forestry can mitigate the health risks of a warming climate. "Heat kills more people than any other weather-related

disaster, and it's something that's getting a lot worse," says Evan Mallen, senior analyst for Georgia Tech's Urban Climate Lab, who is serving as an instructor for the Accelerator program. "[This program] will help make sure this money is really spent in a way that is efficient, effective, and equitable."

Sixteen cities joined the first program as full participants, bringing in representatives from urban forestry and public health departments, community groups, and nonprofits to share strategies with one another. Dozens more communities and federal officials signed up as observers. Subsequent programs will focus on issues such as storm and flooding risks and green infrastructure.

Conserving, restoring, and planting urban trees

In Austin, Texas, one of many communities with racial and socioeconomic disparities in tree coverage, representatives from several city departments will join the accelerator program.

"We're projecting more extreme heat, more extreme rainfall events, and more prolonged periods of extreme drought [due to climate change]," says Rohan Lilauwala, Austin's environmental program coordinator. "Those environmental hazards are disproportionately felt by low-income and communities of color, and one of the things we need to do is direct our tree planting, our land conservation, and our ecosystem restoration efforts towards those communities."

In Waukegan, Illinois, middle school students planted 26 trees and established a new food forest with the help of The Morton Arboretum. The arboretum leads the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, a broad coalition of partners working to increase equitable tree planting and conservation across communities.

COURTESY THE MORTON ARBORETUM

The city of Chicago has committed to planting 15,000 trees a year for the next five years, but many surrounding communities are still working to build their urban forestry capacity, says Lydia Scott, director of the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, a partnership of organizations and agencies across 284 communities in the area.

"We want forestry to be at the table and this impact of green space to be at every level of cities' decision-making process," she says. "Hopefully, we'll see some great opportunities for us to replicate what's happening in other places and go at solutions collectively from a national perspective."

Building a green workforce

Another of the group's instructors is Julia Hillengas, co-founder and executive director of PowerCorpsPHL, a program in Philadelphia that provides job opportunities to young people in fields such as urban forestry and green infrastructure. She will be helping cities consider the challenges and opportunities of building the workforce needed to put the federal funding into action.

"There's a big question of timing—when funding hits and how fast people can get things off the ground," she says. "It's going to force this internal look of 'Do we have the talent? Are they ready to go?' Communities can really step up on the economic side of things in a way that includes great-paying jobs in an industry that's growing."

Leaders in Cleveland are also focused on building an urban forestry workforce: the Cleveland Tree Coalition, a group of more than 50 public, private, and nonprofit partners, formed in 2015. It aims to grow the city's tree canopy coverage to 30 percent by 2040, up from the current 18 percent mark.

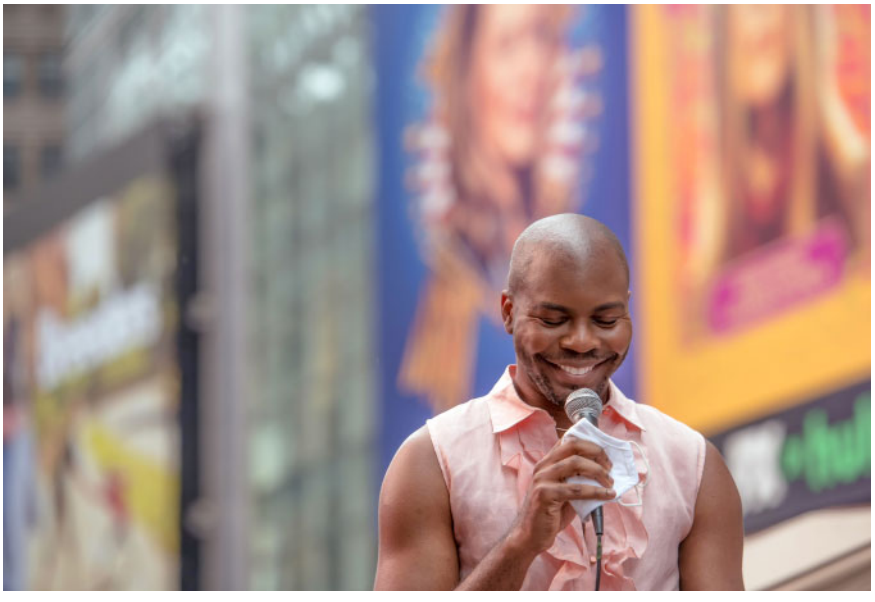
"Trees are a long game," says Samira Malone, who was named the coalition's first director last year. "It's going to take some time for us to see and feel the benefits of planting, but this is also an opportunity to intentionally, strategically, and restoratively diversify the field of green jobs."

Alex Brown is a staff writer for Stateline. *This story was reprinted with permission from* States Newsroom, *a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.*

PUBLIC SPACES

Why We Need Queer Urbanism

The planning structures and norms built for heteronormative families and relationships exclude—and can even endanger—queer people, especially those who are trans or BIPOC. By Aaron Greiner



KEVIN RC WILSON/ALAMY

People who are trans and BIPOC face threats of violence in public spaces, making it urgent for planners to consider how to actively protect and include them.

QUEERNESS IS DEFINED by public perception. One can only be queer—initially defined as "strange" or "odd"—in comparison to others. Though the LGBTQ+ community has reclaimed the word, it doesn't change the fact that queer people are systemically excluded from urban design.

What I call Queer Urbanism takes an approach to planning that centers identity, breaks norms, and gives people agency to adapt a space to meet their needs. This approach is most needed where queer people typically experience discrimination: in public spaces.

In his article "Planning as a Heterosexist Project," Michael Frisch, AICP, argues urban planning structures—from zoning regulations to public space design—promote cisgender and straight identities while suppressing queer people. They erase queer people from public life and create an urban landscape that is decidedly cisheteronormative.

Time to change lenses

Much of our social infrastructure in the U.S. is pay-to-enter. Whether cafes, museums, and even barbershops, payment is required to participate in the space's public life. Of the social infrastructure that is free, much of it (parks, schools, and libraries) caters to people with children.

Consistently, queer people have been excluded from family-oriented spaces with discrimination disguised as concern for children's safety. The other major public space is the street—but it can be unsafe for queer people, especially those who are transgender and/or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).

As we build cities for the 21st century, we need a new lens to center queer people in public life: Queer Urbanism.

Make it intersectional

Statistics show that trans and BIPOC queer people experience more discrimination and barriers than cis and white queer people. In his article "Why do so many queer folks love urbanism?," Wyatt Gordon writes for Greater Greater Washington, "Too often the things that we have in common as queer urbanists—namely, our contempt for car dependency and aversion to heteronormativity—tend to distract from the ways in which systemic inequities of racism, sexism, and transphobia replicate themselves in our own niche sphere of society."

Dhanya Rajagopal, a planner and director of placemaking for the firm Mirabilis Advisory, interviewed Jah Elyse Sayers and John Bezemes for Design Trust for Public Space. Sayers, a doctoral student in environmental psychology and former Equitable Public Space Fellow at Design Trust for Public Space, shared, "As a working-class Black gender-nonconforming transmasculine person, my experience of gay bars and nightclubs has included being ignored by staff, dealing with transphobia from other patrons, and being asked to leave because I haven't bought

anything yet or in a while."

Queer people are well-positioned to flip the script. According to a Pew Research study, LGBTQ+ people are "more likely to perceive discrimination not just against themselves but also against other groups with a legacy of discrimination."

Queer Urbanism realized

As a queer-led organization, we at CultureHouse use a lens that doesn't assume cisheteronormative identities—therefore creating infrastructure that doesn't enforce cis and straight norms. Our spaces are free to enter.

Planners can adjust their thinking and perspective to practice Queer Urbanism. In his article "Queer Urbanism" in *Public Art Review*, planner James Rojas describes how he found, through a series of workshops, that "the most powerful lesson … is a simple one: the needs and values of queers should become part of the discourse of urban planning and design." This begins by involving queer people of diverse identities in all levels of planning, from hiring them as planners to engaging them in project consultation and centering them during community engagement.

A good indicator of whether a place meets the principles of Queer Urbanism is whether people feel comfortable showing public displays of queerness—often through clothing, speech patterns, and affection—an indication that queer people feel like they don't have to code switch to be accepted.

Queering our spaces—operating outside traditional structures and forces—frees them from heteronormative expectations. As Rojas writes in his article noted earlier, "Queer difference can make a difference—if we make room for it."

Aaron Greiner is an urban designer and social entrepreneur from Somerville, Massachusetts, and the founder and executive director of CultureHouse, an urban design nonprofit. Greiner adapted this article for Planning *from his essay "We Need Queer Urbanism," posted on Medium.*

PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLANS

How ADUs Can Help Expand Housing Choice

A LACK OF HOUSING diversity forces many people to live in homes that don't meet their needs. Often, residents experiencing disabilities and older adults who wish to "age in place" are stuck in houses that aren't accessible. Or homeowners are unable to use their property for purposes like accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

"In the average neighborhood, eight out of 10 homes are zoned for single-family-only housing. That means that we have very few other options for folks," says Rodney Harrell, PHD, vice president of Family, Home and Community at AARP's Public Policy Institute.

"In many communities, over time, some of the zoning that's been put into place has been done just to keep certain people out of communities," Harrell says.

"The same way that planning and zoning has been used in the past to keep communities apart and to keep people out," he says, "we can use those same tools to help bring communities together and bring people together."

Now, longtime partners AARP and APA have come together to develop a new tool for planners. The report, *Expanding ADU Development and Occupancy: Solutions for Removing Local Barriers to ADU Construction*, released in May 2023, is aimed at helping community leaders, planners, and housing practitioners and advocates use zoning reform to take concrete steps to overcome barriers to expanding local supply and legal occupancy of ADUs.

Planning sat down with Harrell, a former planner himself, to talk more about how planners can help others understand the benefits of housing diversity—including ADUs—in their neighborhoods. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

COURTESY RODNEY HARRELL

'Simply put, we need more housing options to help people have a better chance of getting the housing that meets their needs.'

—RODNEY HARRELL, PHD, VICE PRESIDENT OF FAMILY, HOME AND COMMUNITY, AARP PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Q&A

***PLANNING:* What are some of the regulatory barriers in place that are keeping us from being able to create more housing diversity?**

HARRELL: What often occurs to me is that communities are trying to preserve what they have. So they'll do things like ban other forms of housing other than single-family. And they're doing that to try to protect some core of the community, but often, that actually has the reverse effect of limiting the choices of the people in that community, and it can work against them. Having more options, having the ability to be in a house of a different type or size in the various locations around the community, that can really benefit folks.

***PLANNING:* How can planners respond to NIMBY backlash and resistance to land-use and housing policy changes in a way that will bring more people along?**

HARRELL: Planners can help people understand the types of changes that will benefit real people in the community, what those pros and cons are. We can point out that, say, creating an accessory dwelling unit ordinance in our town might allow you to build a unit in the backyard for your mother or house a caregiver if you need care. Or it can act as an income-generating source for you. We ourselves also need to understand that in the future I might benefit from this.

It's your job as a planner to bring that to the conversation for folks. You also can show them how neighboring communities are finding success by expanding housing choice. Mayors and other civic leaders also can help by saying, "That community across the region, they've got a policy that allows ADUs, and they're doing better because of it. Maybe

we should do that." Providing examples is one way to help people understand that it might not be as scary as you think to put some of these options into place.

***PLANNING:* Besides planners, who needs to be brought together to find local solutions to land-use and housing challenges? Who are the critical stakeholders?**

ADUs, like coach houses and in-law units, are gaining popularity as a way to increase and diversify housing supply.

HARRELL: A key part of my philosophy on understanding and creating change in this space is that it's an all-hands-on-deck kind of an issue. We need individuals in the community to be educated about the kinds of options that we're talking about and how it may benefit them. We need local officials to be educated about the policies. We need the private sector educated about these options and how they might serve their customers better now and into the future.

Planners are in a unique position to have a broad, long-term view and to be able to help the process of bringing in the partners and parties that need to be involved to make sure we make a communitywide decision. In every community, that lineup is going to be different. But the idea is that you need to bring together and hear from the key stakeholders so that we can craft the policies for this particular community that benefit them the most. It also isn't a one-and-done kind of a thing. We might have to take multiple bites at the apple to get the policies in place that we need.

***PLANNING:* Do you have any personal stories that help explain why having housing choice matters?**

HARRELL: I remember talking to an older woman outside of Hoover, Alabama. She was really starting to struggle a little bit because her house had a huge amount of stairs. But she was determined to stay in the place where she was. I asked her what might happen when she was not able to do the stairs anymore. She said, "Well, I'll just figure it out when that happens."

I think about her a lot. She felt that remaining in that particular home was the only way she could stay in that community, with her friends, her church, her neighbors. She just couldn't see any other choice.

I wonder what stories like hers would be like if there were a range of options. Maybe there was a one-story place that may have some universal design features near the town center that she could have moved into. And would she have been happier and healthier, safer there? I don't know. But I do know that there are millions of people like her who are in communities with really limited choices. And when choices are limited, it often means that we compromise things that we really shouldn't have to compromise. I think about people like her all the time.

***PLANNING:* How can APA and AARP work together in that effort to build political will, overcome resistance, and advance key reforms?**

HARRELL: What AARP can do, what APA can do, what others can do, is start by helping people understand how housing options can benefit them and their families into the future. Then, we can work on building the legislative framework to do it, helping reduce some of the other barriers, as well.

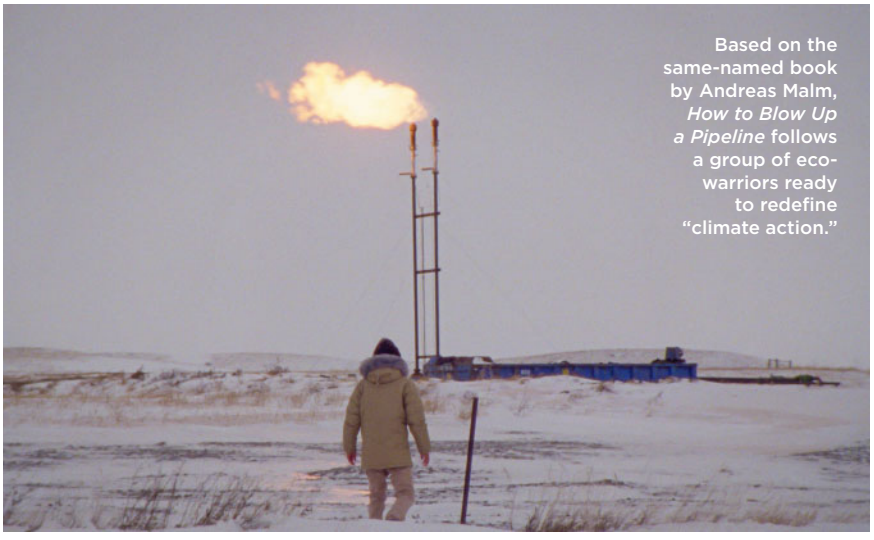
I think one of the biggest things that we can do is provide resources to planners. Specifically, we have a model act on accessory dwelling units; we have a new model act on missing middle housing, And the policy guides that APA puts out—all these are resources that planners have and they can take with them to help either create the legislation or make the case for the kind of changes that people need.

We're going to continue to do that, and I'm hopeful that APA will do that as well. We'll help the planners do what they need to do to make their communities better for all.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Want to learn more? Scan the QR code below to see the full interview.

CELESTE NOCHE



Based on the same-named book by Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* follows a group of eco-warriors ready to redefine "climate action."

COURTESY NEON

NOW STREAMING

The 'Fierce Urgency of Now' Drives This Film Adaptation

And it poses a complicated question: What will it take to truly address the climate crisis? By Ezra Haber Glenn, AICP

IN EARLY 2021, a shocking new book by Andreas Malm caused a stir in environmental policy circles. Titled *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, this clarion call for the climate crisis analyzed past social movements—everything from women's suffrage and the fight against apartheid to a wide range of democratic revolutions—to pose the question "With the stakes so high, why haven't we moved beyond peaceful protest?"

Despite the eye-catching title, the book itself does not provide a blueprint for blowing up pipelines but is a moral framework to render such acts reasonable, indeed rational. Malm's intent was to be provocative, not incendiary. The book argues that real social change cannot depend on nonviolent organizing and peaceful protest alone; revolutions have always come as a result of property destruction (or at least the threat of it).

Two years later (with, needless to say, little progress in reversing the crisis; global CO2 emissions and temperatures continue to rise), Malm's title has been repurposed as a film with renewed vitality and a sense of burning urgency. Rather than an adaptation per se, the film *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* is a work of fiction inspired by the book. It's a clever switch, exploiting the power of storytelling to move us from "what if…?" to "why not…?," escalating the original provocation to a whole new level.

Written and directed by Daniel Goldhaber, the story follows eight young eco-warriors as they hatch a plan to (spoiler alert) blow up a pipeline. Through flashback sequences we see them meet and struggle through the moral, personal, and political implications of what they are considering. Once resolved to act, the group must first plan—not exactly like planners but more like a tactical military team coordinating a strategic strike: part terrorist cell, part revolutionary vanguard.

The film narrative is surprisingly animated, says the author, and the pacing is more like a heist movie than an eco-parable or dry documentary. *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* is currently available on video on demand.

Perhaps the cleverest part of the plot is the group's insistence that they strike the blow against Big Oil without causing unnecessary environmental damage or harming anyone (directly, at least), two requirements that complicate their task. To avoid polluting the very Earth they are trying to save, the team must manage some complex logistics that planners will appreciate, knowing how tricky it can be to site straightish pipes, roads, and rails across real topography.

The narrative doesn't spend much time actually explaining the science or policy behind climate change. And yet, in many ways, that's the point: all the science and understanding and speeches and demonstrations and teach-ins and movies aren't moving the needle enough.

For planners, the film will be an important reminder of what Martin Luther King Jr. dubbed "the fierce urgency of now": when gradualism and incremental approaches may lead to "too little too late." If we can rise to the moment and engage the pressing need—moving forward, together—we have an opportunity to demonstrate the bold visions, grand plans, and progressive solutions that many people still associate with planning.

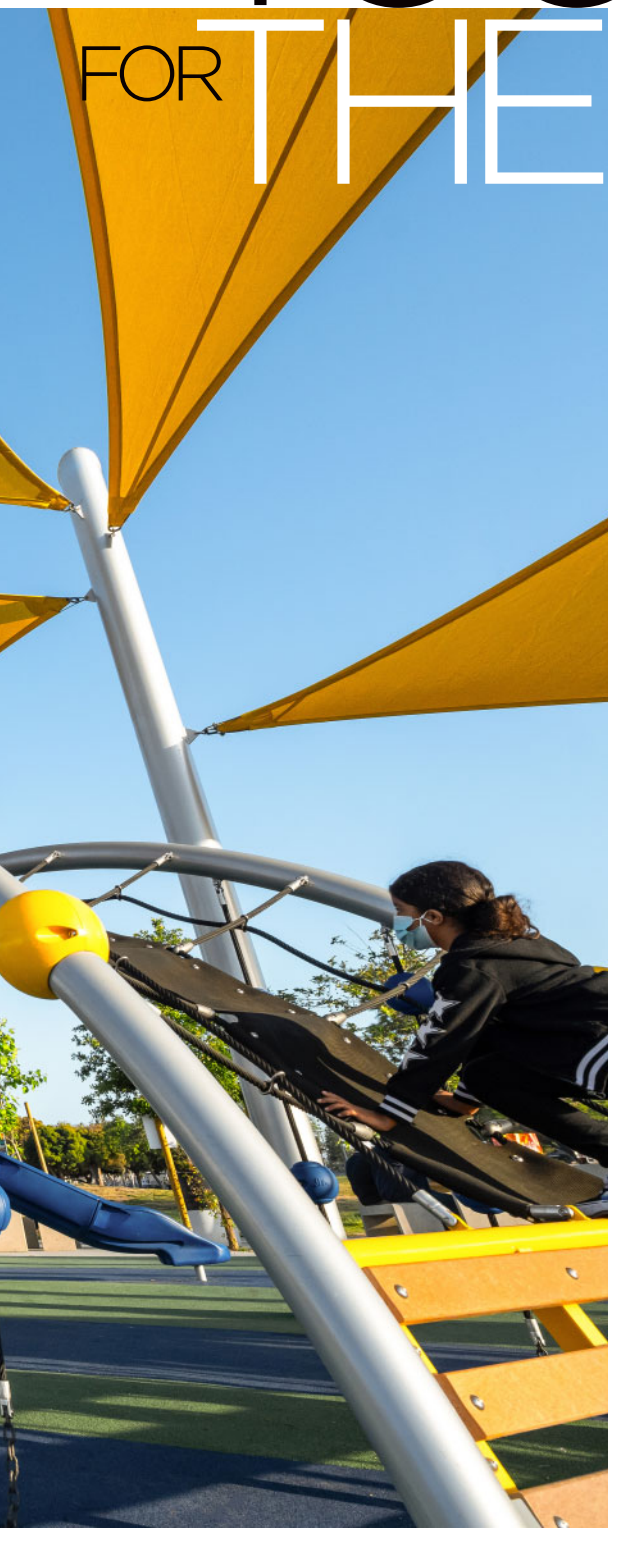
"Make no little plans" was our original brand slogan, after all.

Ezra Haber Glenn, AICP, is Planning's regular film reviewer. He teaches at MIT's Department of Urban Studies & Planning. Follow him at urbanfilm.org.

At Earvin “Magic” Johnson Recreation Area, youngsters can enjoy recent improvements like habitat restoration and biodiversity projects. The Los Angeles County park is in Willowbrook, an underserved area with a high level of park need, according to the 2016 Parks Needs Assessment (PNA). The PNA+ identified Willowbrook as a high priority area for regional recreation, as well.
COURTESY OF MIG, INC.

TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

KNOWLEDGE YOU CAN PUT TO WORK
Parks | Housing | The Profession | Tech



PARKS

TRACKING STEPS TO EQUITY AND CONSERVATION

Planners harness data from cellphones and fitness apps to reveal vulnerable areas and inform a plan. *By Clement Lau, FAICP*

IN LOS ANGELES (LA) County, it's much easier to find a beautiful, tree-filled park with attractive amenities in Beverly Hills than in East LA or South LA. Home to 10 million residents, LA County has about 1 million acres of parkland—38 percent of the county's total land area. But there are wide disparities in where these parks are located, how easy they are to get to, and what they offer.

Luckily, there is plenty of data—including some from new and innovative sources—to help ensure that LA County's park planning is equitable today and tomorrow. The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) recently began to use data from fitness trackers and smartphone apps, among many other data sources, to help examine and reimagine park restoration and conservation through an equity lens.

DPR's efforts align with the global "30x30" initiative, which aims to conserve 30 percent of lands and coastal waters by 2030 to address climate change and protect biodiversity. LA County's 30x30 strategy reimagines conservation through an equity lens to include both the protection of natural lands and the restoration of degraded lands (such as decommissioned oil fields and landfills), especially in lower-income communities and communities of color. Restoration needs and environmental burdens are concentrated in these neighborhoods. In fact, people of color account for 84 percent of the 1.6 million LA residents living in priority areas for restoration.

Data, mapping, and analyses

In December 2022, the Parks Needs Assessment Plus (PNA+) was adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. PNA+, developed by DPR with consultants from MIG Inc., builds on a 2016 PNA. The PNA+ Final Report presents data, maps, analyses, community input, and recommended actions for land conservation and restoration, transit to parks, and other strategies to meet local and regional recreation needs, especially in the most vulnerable communities.

The PNA+ focuses on the most vulnerable residents: those living in park-poor and tree-poor

communities across the county. Vulnerable areas are identified and mapped using GIS and data from California's Healthy Places Index (HPI). The index addresses four dimensions that make residents particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change: social barriers, transportation barriers, health vulnerability, and environmental vulnerability. The PNA+ also identifies priority areas for conservation and restoration based on an analysis of where environmental benefits and burdens are concentrated. The planners used data from state and federal agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

In addition, the PNA+ maps priority areas for regional and rural recreation based on population vulnerability, access to and availability of existing recreational facilities, and available amenities. Some communities face challenges in using these parks due to location, distribution, and other factors, such as lack of public transit.

In the most urban areas of the county, parklands account for less than 5 percent of lands. And while rural areas have significant acreage dedicated to parkland, they are lacking in certain amenities—such as shaded seating, play areas, and walking trails—needed for recreation and climate resiliency. This is especially true for water-based recreation facilities.

Data from fitness apps

To better understand park access, use, and visitorship, DPR acquired data from fitness apps and cellphones.

To learn more about the behaviors and movements of bicyclists and pedestrians at parks, the PNA+ analyzes free data from Strava, a fitness tracking app. Trip data from Strava users is aggregated and deidentified according to industry standards and then provided at no cost to public agencies like DPR through the Strava Metro dashboard. In lieu of conducting labor- and time-intensive studies at individual park sites, planners and other decision-makers are able to use this data about local mobility patterns to support the development and management of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

To gain better insights about users outside of Strava, DPR also procured smartphone-generated data for 2019 and 2020 from Unacast, a location data company. Using location data, the PNA+ offers detailed park visitorship profiles for about 40 regional-serving parks and recreational facilities across LA County, including a wide range of park types in diverse settings.

Mobility data from smartphones provides unprecedented insight into broad patterns of park use and allows park planners to identify and compare systemwide trends. However, there are some limitations, including that data can only be gathered from the phones of adults 18 and older. For sites that attract large numbers of children on field trips, when they are not accompanied by their individual guardians, visitorship totals may be understated. Additionally, in areas with poor cellular coverage, some visits may not be reflected in the data.

Virtual engagement tools

PNA+ outreach occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person contact was limited and most meetings were virtual. In addition to smartphone data, planners employed the latest digital tools to collect, analyze, and visualize community input.

MAP-BASED SURVEYS. Online surveys collected public input on regional and rural park needs using software called Maptionnaire, which integrates survey questions with photos and interactive maps. Those interactive maps allowed respondents to pinpoint where they lived, which parks they used, which areas they thought needed more parks and recreational amenities, and more. Maptionnaire also enabled efficient

DIMENSIONS OF POPULATION VULNERABILITY

The PNA+ used data from the California Healthy Places Index to identify areas of the county with vulnerabilities in four key categories. Strategies were then tailored to address the conditions that prevent residents from accessing parks and open spaces.

SOCIAL BARRIERS

PREVALENCE OF:
- Young Children
- Elderly
- Non-English Speaking Residents
- Single-Parent Households
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Majority-Minority Population

HEALTH VULNERABILITY
- High Pollution Levels
- Reduced Life Expectancy at Birth

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS
- Limited Active Commuting
- Limited Car Access
- Limited Public Transit Access
- High Traffic Density
- High Pedestrian Injuries

ENVIRONMENTAL VULNERABILITY
- Limited Park Access
- Limited Tree Canopy
- High Percentage of Impervious Surface
- High Excessive Heat Days
- High Urban Heat Island Index Score

SOURCE: PNA+ FINAL REPORT

collection, analysis, and visualization of map-based data, which planners downloaded in formats supported by GIS software.

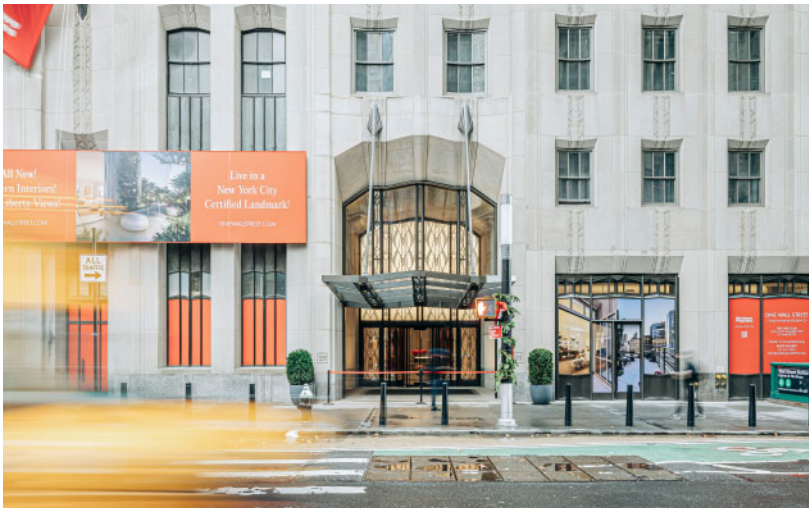
LIVE POLLING. To make online meetings more interactive and to gather instant public opinion, live polls were conducted using Mentimeter. Polls are quick and easy to build with this tool, and responses from the audience appear in real time as dynamic visualizations. Mentimeter can also be used to create live word clouds that highlight the most popular responses to poll questions.

LIVE NOTETAKING. To show participants that their ideas and comments were immediately and properly captured, an ideation and visualization tool called Mural was used as a digital whiteboard with virtual sticky notes for ideas, suggestions, and feedback. DPR received positive feedback about the tool and how its accurate notetaking reflected attentiveness and understanding.

Nothing can replace the connections and opportunities that in-person meetings and activities provide. However, there are tools that can help make virtual meetings more engaging, collaborative, and even fun. Also, online surveys can be much more relatable and visually appealing when interactive maps and images are included.

While there are limitations and costs associated with the use of technology and these data sources and tools, planning agencies should make the necessary investments. Planners must become more data driven and tech savvy to better understand and meet the needs of the communities we serve. In LA County, these tools have been essential to help meet park equity goals.

Clement Lau, FAICP, is a departmental facilities planner with the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.



JEENAH MOON/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*.

As employers struggle to attract office workers back to downtowns and other business districts, more cities are considering commercial-to-residential conversions.

HOUSING

COLIVING, CONVERSIONS, AND CORPORATE OWNERSHIP

Consider these three trends today to understand how they can influence housing tomorrow. *By Joseph DeAngelis, AICP*

THE HOUSING CRISIS following the COVID-19 pandemic has cast several existing housing trends in a new light. Home prices and rent costs have skyrocketed, while rising inflation has pinched already tight housing markets. These three trends explore the dynamics of the present housing crisis and how they could influence the housing choices available in the years to come.

Coliving more common

Homeowners are increasingly holding on to their properties while younger and more diverse populations are largely locked out of the market. For younger buyers, significant existing debts (like student loans) and rapidly rising costs (due to both price inflation and the rise in interest rates) are making homeownership unattainable in the short term. Even in areas embracing zoning reform, continued supply chain problems and inflationary price pressures are disincentivizing builders and developers from constructing new housing stock. This lack of available and accessible housing, even for buyers beginning to approach middle age (in 2022, the median age of first-time home buyers was 36), may have serious repercussions for communities across the U.S.

While coliving has long been a trend in the rental housing arena, cohousing and homesharing are increasingly becoming options for many looking to purchase a house, but who lack the ability to finance it on their own. While often similar in structure to traditional subdivision developments, these types of communities feature novel ownership structures that improve affordability and access for people who may otherwise be unable to purchase a property on their own. The rise of coliving poses new implications for

zoning and land use that should be a priority focus for planners.

Commercial conversions

The option for remote work for many employees resulted in a devastating decrease in office space occupancy (from 95 percent to current rates of 47 percent as of December 2022), turning many downtown areas to ghost towns. As cities and employers continue to struggle to attract office workers to downtowns and other business districts, many communities are considering commercial-to-residential conversions.

In cities that are struggling to address the housing crisis and bring life back to their downtowns, this approach is extremely appealing. However, the cost of converting commercial and office developments into multifamily housing can approach or exceed the cost of new construction. Cities will have to consider how office-to-residential conversions factor into their zoning reform efforts and how this trend could impact their city's post-pandemic trajectory. This might be an opportunity to rethink the structure of our cities to make them vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient.

Corporations buy up housing stock

Large private corporations are playing an increasingly direct role in the purchase and management of affordable housing and rental stock, including single-family homes. The sheer volume of these purchases and holdings by multibillion-dollar private equity firms has an outsized impact on the dynamics of market rates and available stock.

In 2021 and 2022, the top private equity firms owned more than 1 million apartments in large, midsized, and small cities and communities across the nation. After purchasing homes, many firms seek to maximize their profits through cost-cutting, additional fees for rental agreements and payments, and aggressive evictions followed by major rent increases. If this trend continues to drive rent hikes and evictions, planners should be prepared to recognize this issue in their communities and implement necessary measures to make housing affordable and accessible.

Joseph DeAngelis, AICP, is a planner and research manager at APA, where he focuses on community resilience and emerging challenges for the future of cities. He holds a master of urban planning degree from CUNY-Hunter College. This article was adapted from APA's 2023 Trend Report for Planners.

THE PROFESSION

5 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR EMPATHY QUOTIENT

Enhance your leadership ability with this important skill. *By Corrin Hoegen Wendell, AICP*

IN THE WORLD of urban planning, where decisions shape the lives of countless individuals, the ability to lead with empathy is increasingly important. Empathy is the ability to respond to other people's emotions appropriately, to feel what another person is feeling, and to understand someone's response to a situation.

"Planners have an amazing opportunity to approach leadership that's grounded in empathy to create a culture of care focusing on people," says Silvia Vargas, FAICP, LEED AP, principal planner at Calvin, Giordano & Associates. She participated in a panel discussion called Leading With Empathy, hosted by APA's Women and Planning Division (WPD).

So, how does empathy help planners do their jobs better? Here are a few ways:

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY NEEDS

By putting themselves in the shoes of community members, planners gain a deeper understanding of their needs, concerns, and aspirations. It allows them to transcend mere statistics and data, acknowledging the human impact of their decisions. Whether it's improving transportation infrastructure, designing public spaces, or addressing housing needs, empathetic planners can create solutions that truly address the underlying issues faced by residents.

ADDRESSING INEQUITIES

Empathy helps planners recognize the disparities and challenges faced by marginalized communities, so that they can bridge gaps in access to resources, opportunities, and services. By prioritizing equity in their decisions, empathetic planners can create policies and interventions that uplift underserved neighborhoods, reduce disparities, and promote social justice.

FOSTERING INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Equitable, empathetic employers outpace their competitors by respecting the unique needs, perspectives, and potential of all team members. "Leaders need to be ready for employees who expect authenticity in the workplace" says Chloe Greene, founder of Chloe Greene Consulting and a panelist in the WPD webinar. "Planners should lead with an abundance mindset to enhance engagement, motivation, and retention—creating a culture that effectively makes the most of diversity."

As an empathetic leader, she adds, people may not remember what you say, but they will remember how you made them feel.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Building relationships with community organizations, government agencies, and private entities is essential, creating a space for collective action that drives long-term, sustainable results. By creating networks of support, empathetic planners can leverage the strengths of different stakeholders and work toward shared objectives and goals.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Planners who lead with empathy actively seek out diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring that the planning process is inclusive and representative. They create spaces for dialogue, actively listen to residents' concerns, and incorporate their ideas into the decision-making process. This participatory approach not only leads to better outcomes but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride within the community.

BORTONIA/DIGITALVISION VECTORS/GETTY

Corrin Hoegen Wendell, AICP, is the director of community development and planning for Little Canada, Minnesota; the immediate past chair of the APA Women and Planning Division (WPD); and the founder and executive director of YEP! Youth Engagement Planning. The Leading With Empathy webinar, cohosted by WPD and APA Career Services, is available through an APA Passport subscription.

TECH

4 TOOLS THAT PAINT A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE OF CLIMATE AND TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

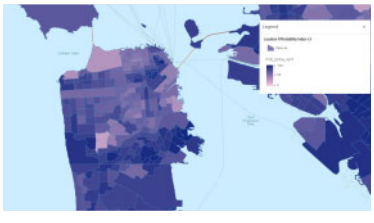
APA's Technology Division shares data visualizers that planners can use to enhance mobility and climate resilience for underserved communities. *By Kelly Dunn and David Wassermann, AICP*

AS COMMUNITIES BEGIN to address the imperative for transformative climate resilience and transportation policies that enhance safety and equity, harnessing pertinent data sources is absolutely critical. An infusion of new funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Justice40 Initiative has laid the groundwork for a national focus on infrastructure investments that bolster underserved communities. Planners can use numerous publicly available datasets—like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's EJScreen—to inform local actions and justify equity-first investments. This data complements Justice40 or U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Disadvantaged Communities data.

Here are four more tools to help planners build a more comprehensive picture of needs, opportunities, and solutions to achieving greater equity in climate and transportation efforts.

LOCATION AFFORDABILITY INDEX

DATA | VISUALIZER



The Location Affordability Index (LAI), developed collaboratively by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and USDOT, provides estimated housing and transportation costs at the census tract level, alongside built environment and demographic data. A rich resource for urban planners, its methodology draws on an intricate web of interconnected independent and dependent variables to produce models that empower users to scrutinize the combined costs of housing and transportation for eight different types of households. Results can be organized by specific household makeup, showing the costs for median-income families, retired couples, single-parent households, and other groups.

These cost profiles can aid planners in crafting narratives to help elected officials and the public understand the potential financial challenges that diverse, particularly socially vulnerable households may encounter relative to others in the same region and then develop informed policies and plans that support them.

COST: ●
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ●
RESOURCE FORMATS: GIS

OPPORTUNITY ATLAS

DATA | VISUALIZER

Public investments are often aimed at improving the neighborhoods and housing where children live in order to provide a path to upward mobility and positive outcomes into adulthood. HUD has studied this intensively, notably in its 1990s-era *Moving to Opportunity Study* and subsequent reports, which found that living in lower-poverty neighborhoods at very early ages has the greatest effect on higher socioeconomic status and earnings later in life. Now, the Opportunity Atlas makes these insights actionable for policy makers. It combines U.S. Census Bureau data with anonymized tax data to identify children's outcomes in identified neighborhoods, in some cases providing estimates of earnings distributions, incarceration rates, and other outcomes in adulthood based on the census tract where individuals grew up. The Opportunity Atlas provides easy options for GIS data downloads and an accessible dashboard that can

COST: ●FREE ●PAID **CODING SKILLS REQUIRED:** ●YES ●NO

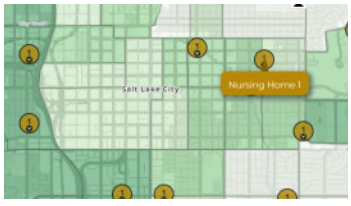
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATHRYN RATHKE

be used to create quick image exports of maps.

COST: ●
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ●
RESOURCE FORMATS: GIS, images

CDC SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX

DATA | VISUALIZER

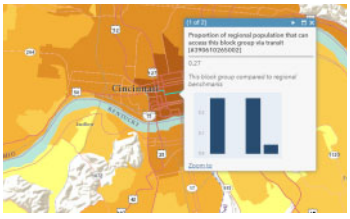


A number of socioeconomic and infrastructure factors affect a community's resilience to both human-made and natural disasters. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention created the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) to help planners and others identify communities most in need of support before, during, and after such events. Considering variables like housing type, socioeconomic status, race, English proficiency, age, and household vehicle availability, the composite SVI can help answer questions such as "Where might transportation challenges make compliance with an evacuation order difficult? Which communities might not understand English-only instructions?" Data is available at the census tract level, and users can also overlay point features such as day-care centers and nursing homes, which are indicators of vulnerable populations. Users can interact with the map online or download the spatial data.

COST: ●
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ●
RESOURCE FORMATS: GIS

SMART LOCATION MAPPING

DATA | VISUALIZER



When low-wage workers can get to jobs on public transportation, it's good not only for workers but also for employers. Enter the Access to Jobs and Workers via Transit tool, a publicly available source of data on the transit accessibility of people, workers, and jobs at the block group level.

A sister tool to the Smart Location Database, it includes metrics related to spatial mismatch, such as the percentage of low-to-medium wage workers in the region who can reach each block group within a 45-minute transit and walking commute from their homes. This tool expands on and lends nuance to the usual jobs-worker mapping analysis, focusing on both workers' access to jobs and employers' access to workers. Users can interact with the map online or download shapefiles for their own analysis.

COST: ●
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ●
RESOURCE FORMATS: GIS

Kelly Dunn is a senior civic data analyst at Alta Planning + Design, with a background in public transit planning and analytics. David Wasserman, AICP, is the chair of APA's Technology Division and leads Alta Planning + Design's civic analytics team, working at the intersection of urban informatics, 3-D visualization, geospatial analytics, and visual storytelling. *The authors thank the Transportation Planning Division's Justin Porter for his review of this article.*

As transit agencies fight to get back to pre-COVID ridership numbers, they also have to contend with budget pressures and changing expectations from the public.

By DANIEL C. VOCK

TRANSIT'S POST-PA

Protesters objecting to Bay Area Rapid Transit budget cuts pause their mock funeral procession in front of San Francisco City Hall.
PHOTO BY SERGIO RUIZ

NDEMIC RECKONING

PHILADELPHIA'S BUSES AND TRAINS ARE RUNNING ON BORROWED TIME.

Three years after the COVID-19 pandemic caused transit ridership to plummet nationwide, passengers still have not returned to their routines from the "Before Times." Ridership on public transportation provided by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) is still well below 2019 levels across the board. Bus ridership recovered the most, but its June 2023 numbers were three-quarters of what they were before the pandemic. Regional rail is at 58 percent, the subway system at 51 percent.

So far, SEPTA has been able to keep its trains and buses running without major service cuts or fare hikes, thanks to pandemic-era subsidies from the federal government. But that money is set to run out in April 2024, and nobody is expecting riders—and the fares they pay—to return to full force by then.

"We need help from our funding partners in Harrisburg (Pennsylvania's capital)," said Pasquale Deon Sr., SEPTA's board chair, when the agency passed its annual budget in June. "The looming fiscal cliff threatens SEPTA's ability to provide reliable day-to-day services—let alone run extra trains when there is an emergency like the I-95 collapse or ramp up for the 2026 FIFA World Cup." As of August, any relief from Pennsylvania state government is tied up in protracted budget negotiations.

The fiscal cliff that looms ahead for SEPTA and other big-city transit agencies is only one example of how societal forces unleashed by the pandemic are changing day-to-day business for transit agencies and, by extension, the communities they serve. Changing commuting patterns brought on by the rising popularity of work-from-home have shaken long-held assumptions about which services to provide. Agencies are also wrestling with staffing shortages and the increased prevalence of violence, drug use, and behavioral issues in public spaces.

On the flip side, the agencies can tap into billions of dollars in new federal infrastructure money, and many advocates, galvanized by free-fare policies during COVID shutdowns, are pushing to get rid of fares altogether.

"Post-COVID, the critical role that transit plays is not going to change, but we have to rethink how we do things and how we make decisions," said Leslie Richards, SEPTA's general manager, during a July webinar hosted by the Volcker Alliance and Penn Institute for Urban Research. "Cities and regions and transit are intrinsically related. Our futures are tied together. The stronger the transit system is, the stronger the region that it operates in is bouncing back."

An uneven financial picture for big agencies

Many of the busiest transit agencies in the country—Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., among them—face similarly daunting financial situations as Philadelphia. They depend heavily on fare revenues, especially for rail systems that attract the kind of wealthier suburban commuter who is now only going into the office a few times a week. And, unlike small transit systems, they usually can't use federal money to pay for day-to-day operations.

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), by far the biggest transit agency in the country, would be in the same boat, too. But state lawmakers came to the agency's rescue this past spring with a deal to dedicate $1.1 billion a year to the agency, including a one-time payment of $300 million. The state has also promised to share a portion of casino revenues with the MTA.

During the July webinar, Janno Lieber, MTA's chair and CEO, said he started pushing for relief more than a year ago because it would be "insane" to impose major cuts in New York. "We have 85 percent of our commuters [using] mass transit, about 5 percent walk, and only 10 percent drive, which is a rich man's game," he said. "It made no sense to wait until you were facing the choice of massively cutting service or massively raising fares or doing layoffs. It made no sense."

California lawmakers also cushioned the blow for major transit agencies, such as San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit, which was facing large shortfalls. But with the state facing major budget troubles of its own, the package was less generous. It included $1 billion in relief and gave the agencies the option of repurposing $4 billion originally meant for infrastructure improvements to pay for operating expenses instead.

DAVID FISHER/FLICKR/DRUM118

The Mountain Line operates buses, paratransit, and on-demand services in Flagstaff, Arizona. The agency is pinched trying to keep up with rapid population growth, but development also helps to deliver much-needed funding in the form of sales-tax revenues.

Smaller agencies build out

Eighty miles south of the Grand Canyon amid Arizona's ponderosa pine forests, the Mountain Line transit agency runs nine bus routes, paratransit, and on-demand services for the Flagstaff area. Heather Dalmolin, the agency's CEO and general manager, says Mountain Line does not face a fiscal cliff like big-city agencies do, but it is still facing mounting financial pressure.

Flagstaff, like most of Arizona, is growing in population. That growth—much of it fueled by development around Northern Arizona University—benefits Mountain Line because it generates more sales tax revenue that the agency depends on.

But with more development comes more demand. Dalmolin says the transit agency will likely have to ask voters for an increase in the sales tax in coming years to expand services and to keep up with escalating costs for labor, fuel, maintenance, and liability insurance. She'd like Mountain Line to expand hours and to potentially offer a connection to a new hospital that is not currently on a bus route. The conversation about those improvements started before the pandemic "as the next evolution of what transit needs to look like in our community" after two decades of having the bus service in place. The city of Flagstaff is even in preliminary discussions to include transit access as a criteria when considering new developments, Dalmolin adds.

"We're at a very exciting time in our community where [we are] making forward progress in ensuring that transit is viewed as valuable as the streets are viewed," she says. The agency has generated community support by keeping buses and bus stops clean and making sure parents know the buses are safe to take their kids to school.

In Conroe, Texas, a fast-growing city of nearly 100,000 people north of Houston, the challenges facing the city-run Conroe Connection start with fundamental infrastructure. Shawn Davis, who oversees the transit service as the city's transportation assistant director, says one of the biggest improvements has been building out sidewalks along a main city corridor. That allows people to get to bus stops, but it also gives them another option for getting around the largely rural area by

having a safe place to walk. For the transit agency, it means that riders who otherwise depended on on-demand paratransit services because of narrow roads or ditches in their way can now take fixed-route buses.

Bus ridership has been increasing since the agency formed a decade ago, and it barely even slowed down during the pandemic, Davis says.

"We didn't have to convince our community as much as we did before how needed public transit was," she says. The agency never cut back its services. "For me, it was a really good kind of soapbox position. I was able to prove that, even if the city shuts down and everyone kind of goes into their private reclusive spaces, you still require services. … With everything slowing down around us, for our community to look out their windows and still be able to see us going was really an amazing thing. It just made a statement for our program."

Test-driving new ideas

The tumult in the transit industry has given both public officials and transportation professionals license to experiment with new ideas or to finally try out long-discussed proposals.

Perhaps the most striking example has been the push in several cities to provide bus or rail service for free. Boston Mayor Michelle Wu made the slogan "Free the T" (a reference to the region's transit system) the rallying cry of her 2021 campaign, and she quickly set to work expanding free-fare bus routes once in office. Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell created a program to help residents of public housing ride for free. The city council in Washington, D.C., voted to make buses free in the capital city, but that effort is on hold for now because of funding concerns.

In the Denver area, the transit agency is lowering fares across the board in an effort to attract more riders. The Regional Transportation District (RTD) expects a 13 percent increase in ridership because of the changes, which also include free fares for youths and deeper discounts for low-income riders. Fare revenue could decline by 20 percent, but that's not as much of a concern for Denver as in other big systems. Fares make up only 8 percent of RTD's revenues, while 76 percent of the agency's funding comes from sales and use taxes.

Debra Johnson, the agency's CEO and general manager, said last year that the many changes following the pandemic could change people's perception of transit. "Transit industries have the chance to rewrite old narratives about the purpose of public transit; no longer will transit agencies be measured solely by the number of customers they can transport but by the value they deliver to the communities they serve," she wrote in a 2023 budget proposal. "This exciting and important discussion of 'value over volume' continues to unfold across the [country] at agencies large and small."

Martin Catala, the program director for transit management and innovation at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida, says that changing commuting patterns will force agencies—especially larger ones—to reconsider the kinds of projects they pursue.

"When you build something that meets the needs of your community, people start thinking of the benefit of it rather than just the cost," Catala says.

One good example of those new kinds of services, he says, is the "wildly popular" SunRunner bus rapid transit (BRT) route in St. Petersburg, Florida, which debuted last October. In March, the service carried 115,000 people, or about 3,700 a day. The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority is already buying more buses to meet demand, and it's expanding the route with money left over from the route's original construction.

The route is the area's first foray into bus rapid transit, an increasingly popular kind of bus route that combines the passenger convenience of rail systems with the familiarity and lower costs of bus routes. In St. Petersburg, turquoise buses run along a 10-mile route that connects beaches, stores, restaurants, bars, a baseball

There's more to transit access than buses and trains. The mobility plan in Conroe, Texas, also focuses on building out sidewalks to connect residents to services—and everything else—in the largely rural area.

JASON FOCHTMAN/©HOUSTON CHRONICLE. USED WITH PERMISSION.

COURTESY CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG

The new Sunrunner BRT system in St. Petersburg, Florida, connects riders to retail, restaurants, the beach, and major institutions. It's not just for commuters, which is a concept older systems have been struggling to adapt to since the pandemic began.

stadium, a hospital, a university, and the recently redeveloped St. Pete Pier. Rides are free—at least through this fall—and buses come every 15 minutes during the day and every 30 minutes from 8 p.m. until midnight. They have semi-dedicated lanes, signal prioritization, level boarding, WI-FI, on-board bike spaces, and limited stops.

Negotiations to build the SunRunner took more than a decade, Catala notes, with the transit agency pushing the BRT concept, the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) securing federal funding, and the three municipalities along the route sorting out the gritty details of parking and signal prioritization and sometimes even changing land use.

The bus service has changed the dynamic of the entire area. Apartment and condo buildings are sprouting up along the SunRunner route. Local residents are parking downtown and catching the bus to get to the beach. Tourists are hopping on from their hotels instead of renting a car to get to dinner.

"There are people that are using it to go to the grocery store. They're actually using it for non-work related trips," Catala says. "I think that's instructive to what the larger transit systems have to start considering: they are no longer services just for commuters. They need to diversify their market opportunities."

Other communities in Pinellas County want to replicate the success of the SunRunner, Catala says. To get the BRT up and running, top MPO officials met regularly with a team from the transit agency, and each of them in turn met with city officials. "The key to that process that made it work so well was the heartfelt, hard-fought negotiation with the municipality," Catala says.

"The message that I think is really important for planners is to hone those skills, the ability to curate people's opinions and get them on the same page. That's actually the really hard work of planners," he says. "The geometric elements, that's a version of math. You can use a lot of tools to get that done. But you can never get a tool to convince two people to agree or two communities to agree to a vision. That's hard work."

Daniel C. Vock is a senior reporter at Route Fifty, *where he focuses on transportation and infrastructure. He has covered state and local government for two decades and is based in Washington, D.C.*

TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, IMAGINE THE FUTURE

How foresight and futures literacy can refocus urban planning.

By PATRICK SISSON
Illustrations by TAYLOR CALLERY

FOR A POWERFUL EXAMPLE of how the future is often unexpected, consider the smartphone. When these devices first became popular in the mid-2000s, few planners (or others, for that matter) had the foresight and imagination to realize that within a decade, mobile computing would send our cities in a whole new direction.

Think about it: what was once a simple communication device has revolutionized urban transportation through ridesharing and micromobility (Uber, Via), housing (Airbnb), and gig work (Upwork, Fiverr). One technology unlocked a series of changes and consequences for cities.

Planners, traditionally focused on the changes their plans and policies guide, often don't fully anticipate how shifts happening in the world around them can significantly affect their communities.

BUT MAYBE THEY NEED TO START.

This smartphone example comes from Petra Hurtado, PHD, director of research and foresight at APA. It showcases the ways that what's inconceivable today could become commonplace—and perhaps highly disruptive—tomorrow. Hurtado's work seeks to bring what's called "futures literacy" to the planning profession.

Planners might argue that their work already focuses on the future. But traditional plans are based on existing data, the patterns of the past, and the assumptions of today. That means they are, by definition, reactive. Hurtado's key insight is that planners need to become comfortable with making plans that are less prescriptive. Planning work—and indeed the profession itself—needs to recalibrate its focus to agility and preparedness for multiple possible futures, as well as on developing the infrastructure needed to be resilient in the face of whatever comes.

"Even though we make plans for the future, we don't always consider the future—or better, multiple plausible futures—in our plans, which is a big issue," Hurtado says.

Planners can acquire the skill of futures literacy and a mindset that, while no one can predict the future, we can prepare for it by combining hindsight, insight, and foresight.

WHAT IS FUTURES LITERACY?

IN AN ERA of rapid economic, technological, and demographic shifts, buffeted and catalyzed by climate change, planners need to adopt a more forward-thinking approach to their work, one that can rapidly evolve and adapt.

Futures literacy is "the skill that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do," according to UNESCO, which calls futures literacy a key 21st-century skill. "Being futures literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover, and invent as changes occur." APA, through its Upskilling Initiative, has also identified futures literacy as an important skill for planners as they address the challenges and opportunities of a changing and uncertain world.

Developing futures literacy will help planners make sense of the future, understand drivers of change that are outside of one's control, and prepare for what may lead to success or failure, Hurtado says. It can also help planners be "comfortable with—and even confident about—uncertainty," she adds.

The concept of futures thinking and related foresight practices initially emerged during the post-WWII period. The concept of strategic foresight was initially embraced by Cold War military planners seeking to game out potential conflicts and de-escalate during the era of superpower conflict.

Soon, the methodology would make its way to corporate America, where leaders sought to future-proof products, business strategies, and their companies and get a better sense of shifting consumer sentiment. It's since been adopted by myriad organizations, including UNESCO, which is working to integrate futures literacy into school curricula.

> Traditional plans are based on existing data, the patterns of the past, and the assumptions of today. That means they are, by definition, reactive.

PLANNING WITH FORESIGHT

NOW FUTURES LITERACY has come to the planning profession, and Hurtado and other proponents suggest planners adopt a series of concepts and methodologies in their work. She calls this practicing foresight, which starts with the future and then reverse engineers what needs to happen today to get to the most desirable outcome. This is different from visioning, which starts with the present and creates goals for the future.

"Local governments are a perfect place for foresight," agrees author and professional futurist Rebecca Ryan, who often consults with cities on long-range planning. "If you start your foresight project for a city based on historical numbers, at best, you're going to get a rinse-and-repeat of your current outcomes. And [worst], you're going to be completely flat-footed for any disruption. Just a 1 percent change, compounded over 20 years, can be huge." There are multiple approaches and methodologies to practicing foresight. (*The Future: A Very Short Introduction* by Jennifer Gidley is a good resource on the history of foresight, futures studies, and futures literacy.)

The most important components when planning with foresight and the most relevant to planning are:

COURTESY ROBERT GOODSPEED

LISTEN TO LEARN MORE

Robert Goodspeed, AICP, professor and author, shares how exploratory scenario planning can be used to prepare for possible alternative futures in an APA Podcast episode. Scan the QR code below or go to planning.org/podcasts to listen.

TREND SCANNING: researching existing, emerging, and potential future trends (including societal, technological, environmental, economic, and political trends, or STEEP) and related drivers of change

SIGNAL SENSING: identifying developments in the far future and in adjacent fields outside the conventional planning space that might impact planning

FORECASTING: estimating future trends

SENSE MAKING: connecting trends and signals to planning to explore how they will impact cities, communities, and the way planners do their work

SCENARIO PLANNING: creating multiple plausible futures

BACKCASTING: understanding what needs to happen today to be prepared for multiple plausible futures

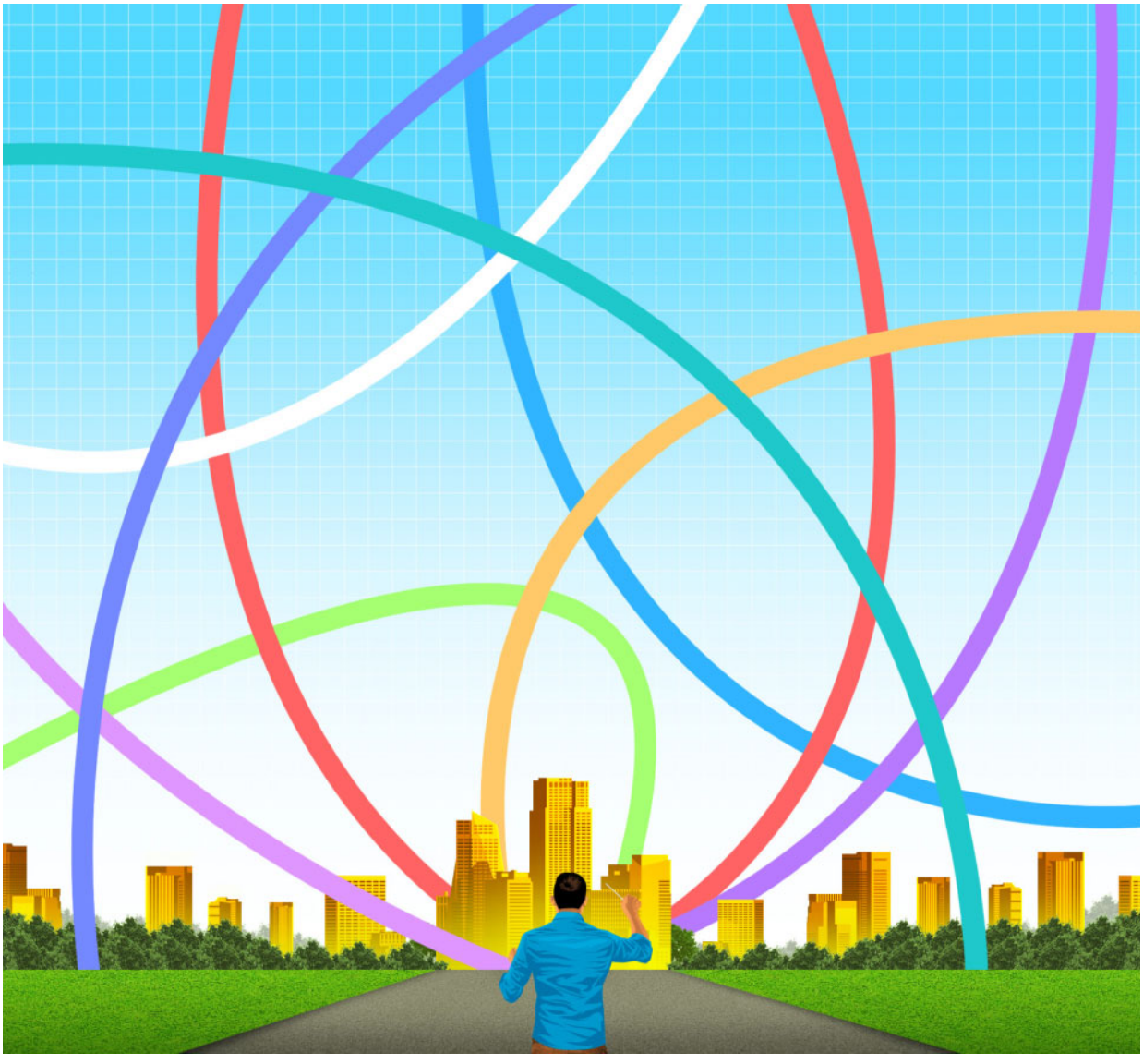
Adopting this kind of strategic foresight should encourage local planning agencies to move from innovating as a response to a crisis to innovating because it's an ingrained part of organizational culture. That also implies that creativity and openness to new ideas are also key to success.

"I do believe that if we want to shape the future, we also need to be able to imagine it. This is about institutionalizing imagination as a very powerful planning tool," Hurtado says.

Also critical is the incorporation of many diverse perspectives into the process. Engaging the community—and every facet of the community—strengthens the results.

"By inviting people into this conversation to look at the challenging things that could go wrong, they realize that inaction is not an option," Ryan says. "That's important in a political environment. Very often, with these really wicked problems, we just kick the can down the road."

Exploratory scenario planning (XSP) can be a particularly useful tool in foresight work because it helps create possible alternative futures. "The methods are based on an open-ended, qualitative exercise of conducting research



and brainstorming about the forces that are going to shape the future of what we're planning," says Robert Goodspeed, AICP, an associate professor at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

The Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, used scenario planning in the Metropolitan Council's 2050 regional planning process, which Hurtado commended for pushing through local policy changes. These exercises can create powerful civic visions that help coalesce political support and achieve clarity around policy.

TREND SCANNING

PART OF FORESIGHT practice is becoming knowledgeable about current and emerging drivers of change. Some of the trend scanning that planners may need is already being done. Hurtado and her team meet quarterly with the Trend Scouting Foresight Community, a group of experts and leading thinkers from numerous disciplines. Their work is compiled annually in the *Trend Report for Planners*, in partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

Planners need to evaluate trends based on their certainty and the effect they are likely to have, then prioritize which ones deserve more focus. That approach invites planners to focus on a range of outcomes, as opposed to only planning for one future and hoping everything works out.

Take the emerging trend of urban air mobility, which might get rated as high-certainty and high-impact in big cities, where this technology is already being tested. (The Federal Aviation Administration plans to allow flying taxis by 2028.) Planners in those cities may want to start preparing for how to equitably and sustainably integrate these emerging systems into the existing transportation network. However, for a rural community, this technology might get rated as low-certainty and medium-impact. In those areas, a topic like lab-made meat might get more attention.

FORESIGHT IN ACTION

IN CALGARY, ALBERTA, the city government has been using strategic foresight for nearly a decade, catalyzed by a catastrophic regional flood in 2013. This weather event made clear to the planning team that they needed to be nimbler and more resilient.

In Calgary's approach, the process starts with a core team that scans for trends and produces internal research. Those results get filtered through all city departments to assist with planning that is innovative and tech-focused, as well as "agile to emerging stresses, shocks, and opportunities," according to the future-focused Calgary website.

Strategic foresight has helped influence all aspects of city planning there—including economic development and post-COVID transportation plans—with a particular focus on adapting to shifts toward digitalization, preparing for climate change, and reinforcing trust in government. There's even a report assessing the top trends for 2035.

"For economic development, this allows us to make sure we have the people skills and educational attainment we need," says Heather Galbraith, Calgary's strategic foresight program lead. Whereas the team used to think, "we'll figure it out as long as we get the businesses to come here," she says, "this new process allows us to really interrogate our strategies and have mechanisms in place to make sure we have what's needed to be successful in the future."

Planning may be criticized for rigidity or trying to create a sense of certainty when cities require agility and dynamism. Planners can respond by building more flexibility into their long-range planning, Hurtado argues, providing mechanisms and milestones within plans that allow for pivots and rapid shifts depending on the changing world.

Planning departments may view this as a daunting task, but Hurtado recommends that departments of any size consult existing resources, including APA's work on foresight and the *Trend Reports for Planners*. These approaches aren't about bold predictions. They are a means to get comfortable with change and be prepared for uncertainty.

"There's no right or wrong," Hurtado says. "It's a very humble type of work, because next year, everything may change."

Planners can build more flexibility into their long-range planning, providing mechanisms and milestones within plans that allow for pivots and rapid shifts depending on the changing world.

FORESIGHT PLANNING RESOURCES

Planners can tap into APA resources on foresight planning, including guides on the process, courses on using the future to create dynamic plans, reports on climate-focused uses of these methodologies, and an expanding library of additional resources. Scan the QR code below or go to planning.org/foresight.

Patrick Sisson is a Los Angeles–based writer and reporter focused on the tech, trends, and policies that shape cities.

Young people are discovering their passion for urban planning via TikTok and other social platforms—before even stepping foot in a 101 course.

By SAKSHI UDAVANT
Photographs by
GABBY JONES

follow the next generation of #urbanplanners

New York City planner Brittany Simmons (left and this page) highlights the emotional impacts of urban design through her posts on TikTok @signedbritt.

The hashtag #urbanplanning has more than 62.6 million views, while #walkablecities has more than 145 million views on TikTok.

Brittany Simmons's videos have amassed more than 2 million likes on TikTok (@signedbritt). Why is that planning news? Because the 26-year-old urban planner's content revolves around her experiences working in the field and her general passion for cities.

"I want to show folks that if they're interested, they can be involved in what happens in their communities and what [those actions] look like, whether that's as a working planner or as an engaged resident," she says. Simmons highlights the emotional impacts of urban design through posts on how car-centric cities make friendships difficult, for example, or how a walkable college campus makes student life memorable.

Urban planning content—often tagged as "#PlanningTok" or known broadly as "CitiesTok" on TikTok—reaches and influences a diverse array of social media users who otherwise might never hear of or participate in the field. The hashtag #urbanplanning has more than 62.6 million views, while #walkablecities has more than 145 million views on TikTok, showing the internet's growing interest in city life, planning policy, and urban history.

The result? Demographic groups creating and engaging with urban planning content are shifting. The planning field has historically been—and still is—dominated by white men, with few women of color, LGBTQ+ people, or people with disabilities recognized for their contributions or status as stakeholders. In practice, this has led to the widespread exclusion of their needs and hesitance from young people from these groups to enter the field. Social media, however, could help change this by presenting planning from a diversity of viewpoints.

This emerging cohort of content creators is not only introducing younger audiences to urban planning; they're also highlighting a growing diversity of thoughts and identities in the field. These influencers are also providing valuable representation that helps their followers envision the careers they could pursue—and the change they could spark.

"It's really an issue when you go into a field and you see nobody like yourself doing it," one follower commented on a video made by Sadiyah Sabree, a planner with a popular YouTube channel who is a Black Muslim woman. "I see you, and I am all of a sudden far more motivated to get into this field."

#CitiesTok is recruiting new planners

When Paul Stout, a landscape architecture student at the City College of New York, studied abroad in Salzburg, Austria, not needing to use a car was a surprising and formative experience. This eventually led him to work for Culdesac, a developer of walkable, car-free neighborhoods back in the U.S.

Studying topics like redlining and zoning policy in school further flamed his interest in the field. But Stout regretted not knowing about urban planning sooner, so he started posting short videos on TikTok (@talkingcities) to make the ideas he found interesting more accessible to others.

"Many … younger people intuitively understand some of these concepts yet have not been formally introduced to them or equipped with the language to talk about them," Stout says. "[Through posts like mine], young people on TikTok are discovering the extent to which our built environment is intentionally planned and designed."

For example, his post on Barcelona superblocks highlights how Spain easily and cost-effectively makes its cities walkable and how these changes positively affect residents. Another post shows how the mayor of Carmel, Indiana, worked to introduce pedestrian-friendly roundabouts.

"Often, my followers are young people who have grown up in auto-centric North American suburbs," Stout says. "They seem dissatisfied with the status quo of our built environment. And I have had a number of commenters tell me that they have pursued education or switched their major because of what they saw on TikTok."

Social media is a powerful force of influence. It's turning planning from a casual fascination into full-time careers for young people who know they want to play a part in transforming their communities but aren't sure how. Stout regularly receives comments from viewers like "This account is one of the reasons I switched to civil engineering for my degree" and "I didn't know how interested I was in urban planning and design." This kind of content is particularly resonating with Gen Z and young millennial followers who are struggling with rising housing costs, lack of walkable communal spaces, and high dependence on cars.

Diversifying the profession

Simmons says she often receives the same question from her followers: "What can I do to get to where you are in your career?" So she made a video showcasing a day in her life as an urban planner at Karp Strategies. Alongside her full-time job, she maintains her account as a resource for aspiring planners.

"Social media is demystifying what urban planning is, how it happens, and how we got to where we are today," she says. "Younger folks and historically marginalized groups are being introduced to the field, and in the future, that could lead to greater diversity among planners and thus more inclusive city design."

Today, nearly 75 percent of urban planners are white, while 67 percent are men. Creators like Sabree, who works in community development, have grappled with this problem firsthand and are advocating for more diversity in the field.

"For urban planners of color, it is our job to properly explain to our communities what it is that we do so people of color don't let the lack of visible Black planners stop them from joining the field," she says in one of her YouTube videos. She posts several Q&A-style videos answering questions from her audience, sharing planning resources, and offering information about career options so more people of color and people from other underrepresented groups can enter the field.

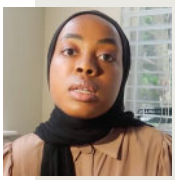
Not every follower will become a planner, but this content can help young people envision themselves in the field—especially when they see more diverse representation. On one of Sabree's career videos, a viewer commented, "I just [graduated] with my master's in urban planning! It's so nice to see Black women getting into the field. Marginalized groups are

COURTESY JAKE GOTTA, SADIYA SABREE, JONATHON STALLS

ENGAGEMENT TIPS FROM THE INFLUENCERS

Three creators share how planners can use social media to engage with their communities. To see their full stories go to planning.org/planning.

JAKE GOTTA
@jake_gotta on TikTok
Jake Gotta is a TikTok creator with a background in political science.
TIP: Anybody in this area can and should use social media to reach, educate, and engage with communities who would otherwise be resistant to change. There are a lot of people out there who will reflexively reject a radical change to their built environment, but they also can and will appreciate how it can make their lives better if we do the work to show people what a better world could look like.



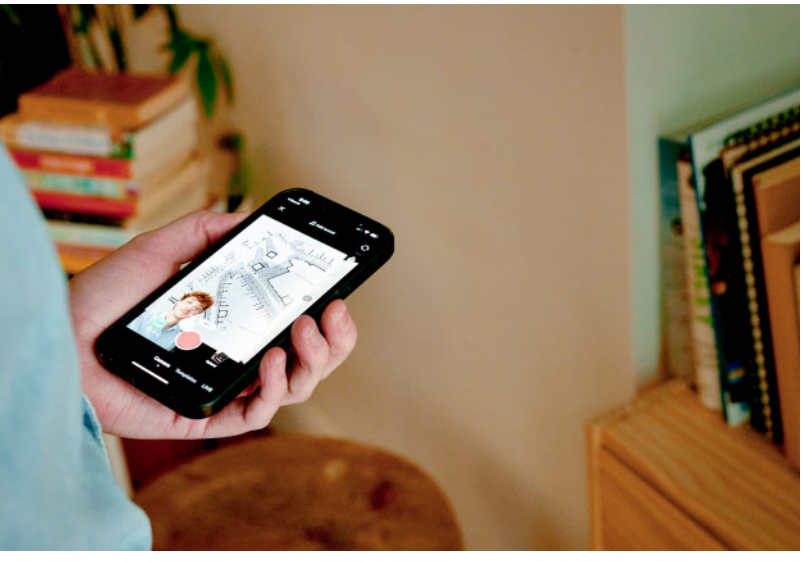
SADIYAH SABREE
Quesadiyah on YouTube
Sadiyah Sabree is a planner and YouTuber in Philadelphia.
TIP: I meet people almost every day who are unaware that urban planning is a profession. I think that if planners were more vocal, they could help to spread knowledge about what we do and help empower residents to become engaged with their local planning authorities.

JONATHON STALLS
@pedestriandignity and @jstallz on TikTok and Instagram
Jonathon Stalls is a queer content creator and the author of *WALK: Slow Down, Wake Up, and Connect at 1–3 Miles Per Hour*.
TIP: Share bite-size educational topics and relatable scenarios that involve planning. Play with social media trends to creatively weave in planning topics. When people ask questions or engage your post/content, reply, and make sure there are pathways for them to go deeper.

Tag and name your location in the text so the tools show your content to more local people. Be specific—street, town, or intersection. Tag local businesses, agencies, and elected leaders in your posts.


Hz
bllx

Content creator Paul Stout frequently gets comments on his TikTok videos like "I didn't know how interested I was in urban planning and design."



TikTok creator Paul Stout (@talkingcities) explains how cities are designed and uses a weath of information and resources. According to his comment sections, his posts are inspiring young people to study planning.

often highly impacted by city plans, but they often do not have the privilege to be active in the decision-making process to begin with."

It's well-reported that Gen Z turns to social media for career advice. YouTube and TikTok give a peek into what life in a profession could be like, as well as the problems that one could help solve as a planner.

"A different future requires different people at the table, different people leading tables, and—for that matter—different tables," says John Joe Schlichtman, an associate professor of urban sociology at DePaul University, Chicago. "Breaking urban planning content out of its usual confines is a way to nudge things in that direction."

Taking planning lessons offline

"Social media is now drastically reshaping the urban planning paradigm, as citizens themselves are a crucial source of user-generated data, continuously supplying real-time information about their preferences and requirements, which can help to improve urban planning," says Steffen Lehmann, professor of architecture and urban design at the University of Nevada and founding director of Urban Futures Lab. "It ensures a more holistic analysis of what is actually happening on the ground."

Residents have always been actively shaping their communities, but social media can amplify changes and create a new space for planners and residents to collaborate. Take Phyllis Mack, a Denver resident who uses a wheelchair and successfully leveraged this generative intersection of planning, community, and social media.

In 2022, Mack applied for and won a grant to interview Denver Housing Authority residents about accessibility and a potential participatory budgeting process. With help from Pedestrian Dignity activist and TikTok creator Jonathan Stalls (@pedestriandignity), Mack's research resulted in $400,000 in funding to design, construct, and maintain accessible sidewalks around her housing complex.

Researchers have already begun studying the various methods urban planners can use to gather data from social media that could potentially influence policy decisions. Online content tools like video comments, web forms, audience polls, hashtags, and more can give planners an instant, deeper insight into what people are thinking—and what kind of change is needed.

"Social media is a place where we can tap into ideas previously limited to often formidable texts," Schlichtman says. It is "a finger on the pulse of urban planning discussions on topics like gentrification, suburbanization, and transportation."

Sakshi Udavant is a freelance writer covering technology and trends around the world.

THE BLOCK PROJECT

Seattle, Washington

TO FIND THE MOST SUSTAINABLE new homes in Seattle, peek into someone's backyard. Since 2017, the BLOCK Project has built 15 tiny accessory dwelling units (ADUs) exclusively for homeless residents seeking new beginnings. BLOCK homes are energy net-positive with 10 solar panels and a rainwater harvesting plumbing system, earning them Living Building Challenge (LBC) Certification. A father-daughter architect duo took this new approach to the crisis of homelessness, which views a healthy environment as necessary to keeping people housed long term. Homeowner volunteers welcome a formerly unhoused neighbor onto their property, encouraging connection across income lines and making single-family-only neighborhoods more inclusive.

Constructed with sustainable, local Juniper wood and wool insulation, BLOCK homes cost $75,000 to build—a quarter of the cost to build a typical affordable housing unit. (Got a climate win-win that makes your Community Green? Tell us about it: email mstromberg@planning.org.)

COURTESY FACING HOMELESSNESS

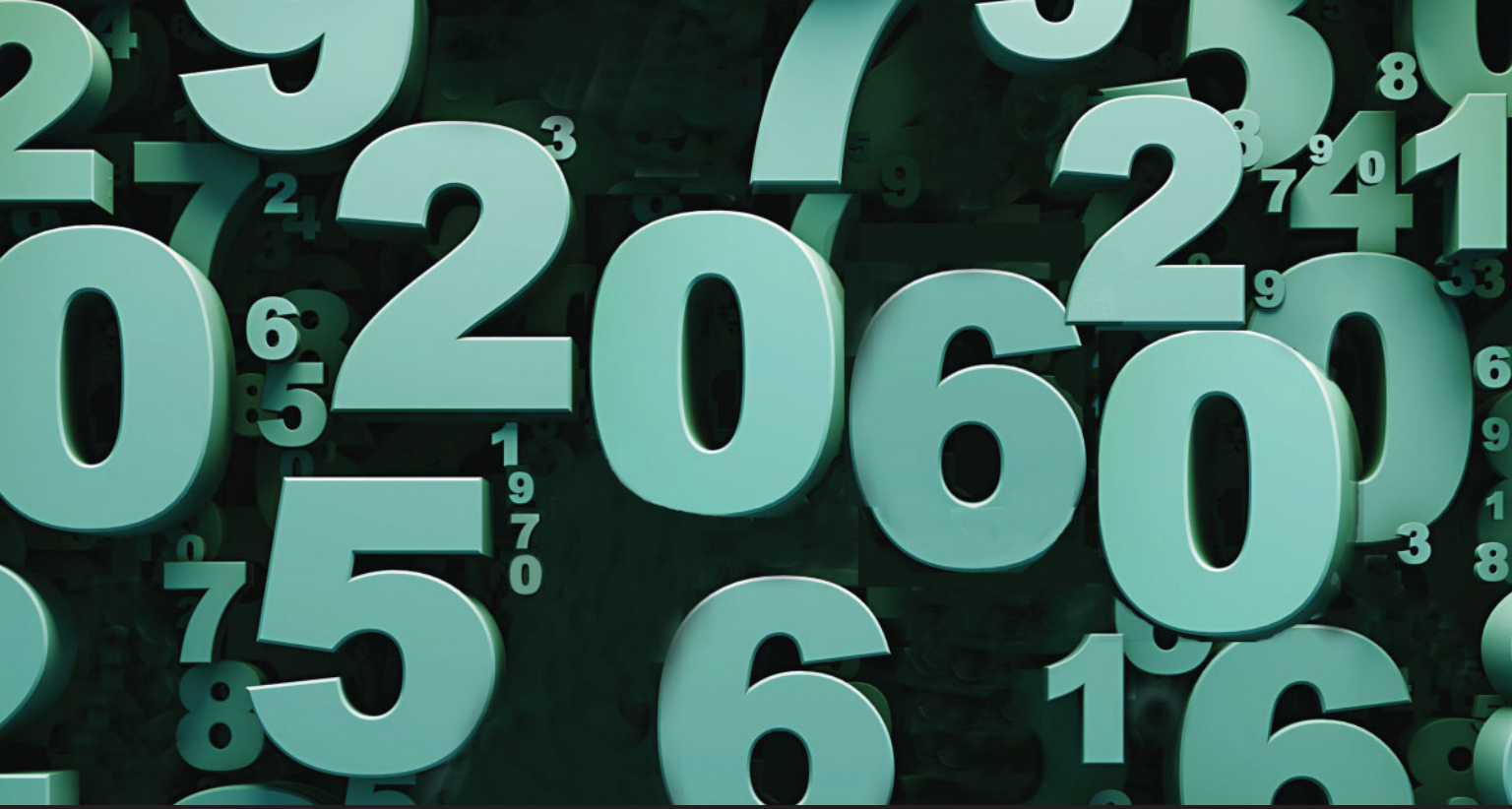
Using the Future to Create Dynamic Plans

The world around us is changing at an accelerated pace, and the future is more unknowable than ever before. **Using the Future to Create Dynamic Plans** CM | 6.0 gives planners the ability to imagine multiple plausible futures, use the future in our work, and plan *with* the future.

PASSPORT

Free for Passport subscribers

Learn More



Our Numbers Add Up

Woods & Poole makes detailed economic and demographic forecasts for small geographies in the U.S. We forecast more than a thousand variables annually to 2060 for every U.S. county. The county forecasts are done simultaneously by economic area within a national framework. We provide the same data and forecasts for every county, no matter how small. Our data and forecasts are widely used, especially by planners and consultants, and we have been producing these same data sets since 1983.

Complete County Economic and Demographic Data

- Population by Age, Race & Sex
- Household Data
- Per Capita Income
- Personal Income by Source
- Retail Sales by Kind of Business
- Employment by Industry
- Gross Regional Product
- Households by Income
- Annual Data 1970 to 2060

Forecasts for U.S. Geographies

- Counties
- Core Based Statistical Areas
- Metropolitan Statistical Areas
- Micropolitan Statistical Areas
- Combined Statistical Areas
- States
- Regions
- U.S. Total

Find Out More | (800) 786-1915 | www.woodsandpoole.com

WOODS & POOLE ECONOMICS
WASHINGTON D.C.