THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2024

PLANNING

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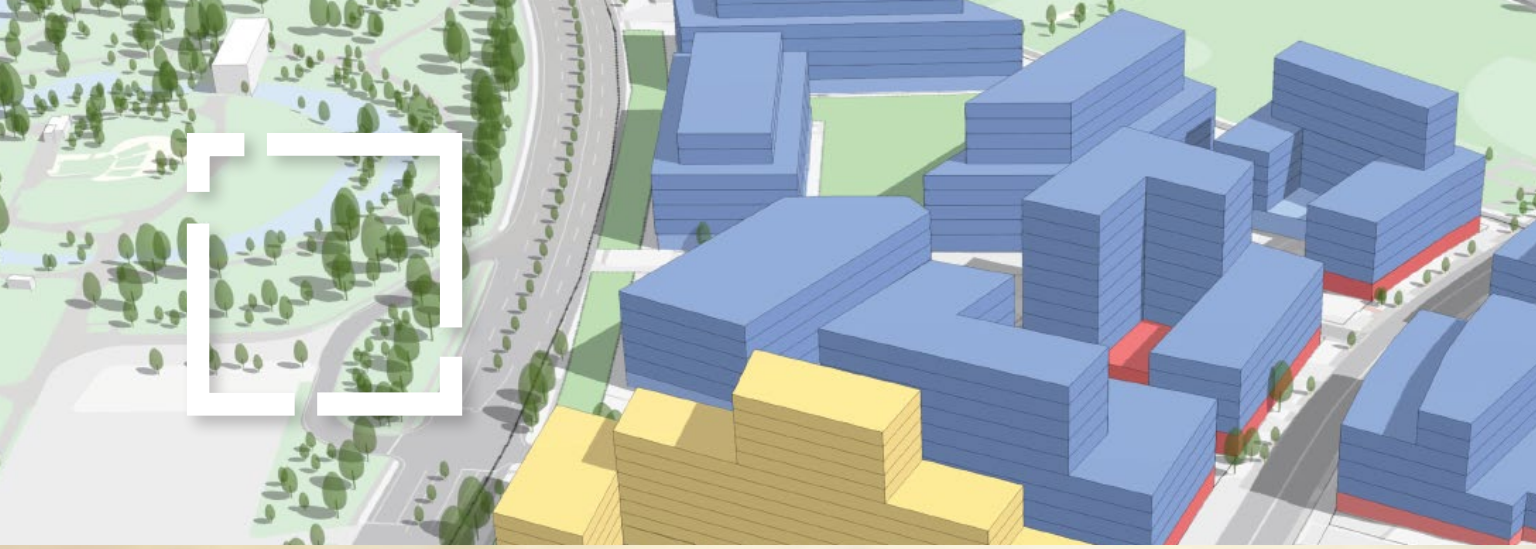
7 WAYS TO MASTER CONFLICT

THE NEW MATH OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE

PLUS: CAN PARKS SAVE DOWNTOWNS?



Design with Data-Driven Plans

Today's planners face a greater number of challenges than they did just 10 years ago. And these challenges are more complex—from overseeing housing capacity and affordability to managing pressing comprehensive plans to tackling zoning reform—all while ensuring that decisions meet the changing needs of the community. Planners need tools that help them to

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On the cover: Northtown Library and Apartments in Chicago combines a vibrant community library with affordable senior housing. From top: Managing conflict doesn't always go by the book; Former President Obama's docuseries honors 21st century work.

Contributors


Carol Coletta and Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP
How to Leverage Parks for Economic Vitality, page 16

Coletta says her work with Memphis's downtown park "gives me new insight every day on how to make vibrant, welcoming, safe public space." As a former parks commissioner, Silver understands the impact of quality urban places. "Public space makes cities livable because they are sanctuaries of sanity that improve physical and mental well-being," he says.


Justice Wahid Cotton, AICP, and Enessa H. Janes, PhD, AICP
You're in Charge Now. Here's How to Make the Most of It, page 21

"We've all been there—a new team, a new role, and no playbook," says Janes, a Colorado-based planning director. After literally bumping into Auburn, Alabama, planning director Cotton at NPC, they bonded over their shared identity as newly tenured, millennial department directors and now share their knowledge as peer coaches.

Kristen Zeis
The New Math of Climate Resilience, page 24

This Norfolk, Virginia, photojournalist has a love for her community and documenting stories that make a difference. "The Ohio Creek Watershed Project is a beautiful example of how government, planners, and a community can work with each other instead of against," she says.

PLANNING

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

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

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FROM THE DESK OF MIKE WELCH, STRATEGY DELIVERY OFFICE DIRECTOR

From Strategy to Action: APA's Evolution

AS AN APA staff member for 23 years, I have seen a lot of strategic plans. For many years, leaders created two-year development plans based on an assessment of the landscape at that moment in time. At one point, that plan had well over 100 items on the to-do list.

Implementing that plan prompted questions from staff and leaders about top priorities, measuring progress, and whether our activities were making a difference. Fortunately, strategic planning has evolved to reflect the realities of a more volatile, competitive world.

With an accelerated pace of change and disruption, the window of time for crafting reliable plans has shrunk. APA now uses a more agile process that addresses 24- to 36-month strategy windows, with a focused set of priorities and actions.

The APA Board of Directors spends a considerable amount of time thinking about trends impacting the profession and the association—disruptors like artificial intelligence, remote and hybrid work, and shifts in the education marketplace. Using the practice of foresight, informed by communities of planners and the APA research team, the Board defines strategic goals and desired business outcomes annually.

APA's portfolio of programs is prioritized with those goals in mind so that limited resources can be spent wisely for maximum impact. Then we use project management principles to develop a comprehensive scope of work, aligning financial and human resources (staff and volunteer committees) to implement it.

Delivering on member needs

APA launched its Strategy Delivery Office (SDO) in 2021. As the SDO director, I now work every day to develop and implement strategic programs and project management excellence across APA. It's about aligning the people, processes, measurements, and standards across our strategic priorities to ensure APA is meaningfully advancing our mission to "create great communities for all."

'It's about aligning the people, processes, measurements, and standards across our strategic priorities to ensure APA is meaningfully advancing our mission to "create great communities for all."'

—MIKE WELCH

After a few short years, clear benefits are emerging.

The **APA FORESIGHT PRACTICE** is generating annual insights into our changing world and the future of the profession and sharing them in the *Trend Reports for Planners*.

Our **UPSKILLING PLANNERS** initiative provides members with practical skills and tools to navigate the evolving landscape of planning, including an all-new skills-based set of educational offerings.

The **VOICE OF PLANNING** initiative includes an exciting outreach campaign called "It Takes a Planner," which includes resources for communicating the unique value that planners provide to decision makers. This message platform has enabled APA's incredible Housing Supply Accelerator partnership, tackling one of the most pressing planning challenges of our time.

The **PRIORITIZE EQUITY** initiative elevates voices of advocates and those who have historically been under-represented in planning, and it provides planners with tools like the Equity in Zoning Policy Guide and a new library of case studies.

There are many other improvements, enhancements, and innovations to emerge from our more focused approach to portfolio and project management, which I know members will enjoy in the years ahead. And I look forward to helping APA get there.

Mike Welch is the APA Strategy Delivery Office director. You can reach him at mwelch@planning.org.

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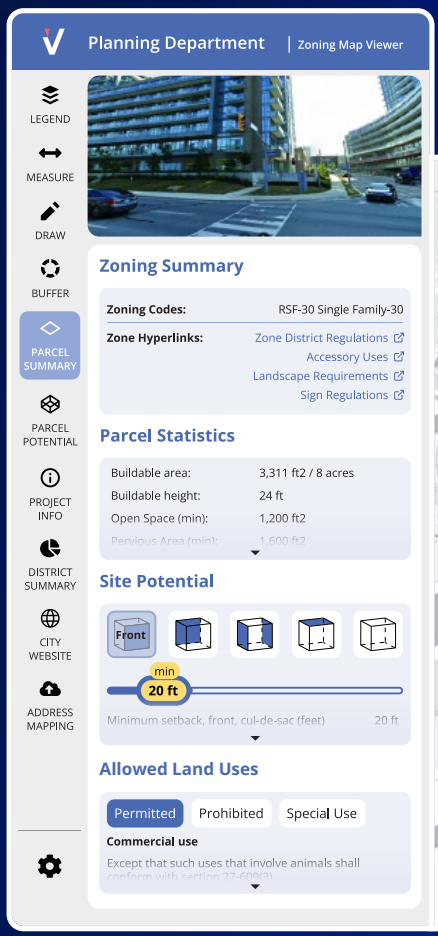

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The intersection of Erie Avenue, Germantown Avenue, and Broad Street remains the heart of the vibrant neighborhood known as North Philadelphia, just as it was in the 1940s. A pilot project aims to capture the stories behind these historic places, as well as the personal narratives, local traditions, and folk memories that make the neighborhood special.
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Treasure Philly! Embraces History Beyond Buildings

An innovative program preserves and celebrates North Philadelphia history by listening to its Black residents' stories. By Jake Blumgart

THE INTERSECTION OF Broad Street, Germantown Avenue, and Erie Avenue arguably forms the heart of North Philadelphia.

It's a bustling locus of transit, shopping, and food that caters to the Black working-class and lower-income communities that surround it. During the day, pedestrians, cars, and transit users—the Broad Street subway rumbles beneath the intersection—create a lively street scene.

It's here where the Philadelphia Historical Commission is experimenting with a new preservation strategy, far from the wealthier neighborhoods, such as Society Hill or Rittenhouse Square, that are most associated with their regulations and influence.

The initiative, titled "Treasure Philly!," seeks to deeply engage communities to help them to record local traditions and the places that make them. Often, those stories and experiences exist in a folk memory that's absent from mainstream media and academic history.

"We are looking at ways outside the traditional avenues we use at the Historical Commission and in the field of preservation to celebrate, protect, and preserve these histories we're working with the community to identify," says Shannon Garrison, a preservation planner at the commission. "Then we'll think through what the options are for protecting them."

Strengthening existing relationships

This ambitious project is starting at the Broad, Germantown, and Erie intersection because a city-initiated public engagement campaign is already underway in the area around infrastructure improvements to streets and public space. Other city agencies had already established relationships with community groups and neighbors in the area, and commission staff felt that would give them an easier starting point for their Treasure Philly! pilot.

"One of the things that's really important to this project [is] community engagement," says

Martha Cross, AICP, an acting deputy director in the Department of Planning and Development. "That requires a lot of relationship building, so in doing this pilot we looked for a place where a lot of community organizing had already happened and relationships with the city had already been built."

The effort began with a gathering of 50 residents at Zion Baptist Church on Broad Street in late August. They were led by a consultant, Rosalyn McPherson of the ROZ Group, in a wide-ranging discussion about their memories of the neighborhood, its underappreciated history, and the stories that their families passed down.

The meeting lasted two hours, and the audience was intergenerational. Historic community icons were highlighted, such as James Fraser, the music director at Zion Baptist, who created what is believed to be the first all-Black orchestra to play at the Academy of Music in 1978, and State Representative Ruth Harper, who operated a charm school above her legislative offices on Erie Avenue.

"[The crowd] bounced stories and memories off of each other about the area, and we sat and listened and took notes, and then followed up with those people individually," Garrison says. "Then we did research based on the conversations at that event and started to identify specific things that we wanted to dig deeper into."

From top: In the 1980s, neighbors built concrete flower boxes for each house on the 3700 block of North 15th Street, winning it the Most Beautiful Block award from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1988. A piece of cultural history, the flower boxes likely would not be noticed in a traditional historical survey.

Neighborhood resident Joyce Drayton told a story about her mother, Georgia E. Gregory, who once directed the Sunday School choir at Nazarene Baptist Church and whose memory is part of the area's treasured history.

Many residents remembered Ruth Harper, a Pennsylvania State Representative who, until 2004, also operated a finishing school for neighborhood girls above her legislative offices on Erie Avenue.

COUNTERCLOCKWISE: GRACE SWEETMAN/PHILADELPHIA DPD (2); ALBA JULIAO/PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

A new way to manage change

Further research is expected to take the rest of the year, with the staff following up with attendees of the August meeting as well as neighborhood advocates and business owners with deep roots in the area. The staffers are asking residents to walk their blocks with them or, if there is a particular place in the neighborhood that is especially meaningful to them, to set up a meeting there.

Then the staff will document their stories and make a list of the stand-out locations in the neighborhood. The exercise is partly a traditional building survey to find unprotected historic treasures, but the commission staffers also hope it will result in a deeper understanding, and documentation, of hyperlocal traditions and stories. How, Garrison asks, do you preserve a favorite recipe or a beloved local restaurant?

Part of the result of Treasure Philly! will be that a handful of iconic local buildings will be added to Philadelphia's register of historic places, protected from demolition and subject to commission regulation. But Garrison and Cross are still figuring out the final stages of the project and how it could change the way the city handles its own evolution—beyond the bounds of traditional preservation policy.

"We're testing a methodology here to replicate sustainably across the city," Cross says. "If we could understand the context of history, and the narratives of the people who live there, how might we manage change differently?"

Jake Blumgart is a reporter at The Philadelphia Inquirer.

COURTESY CITY OF RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

In North Carolina, Raleigh's Sip n' Stroll Downtown is a special social district that allows open containers of alcohol within strict boundaries. Some states are allowing cities to create these districts in hopes of boosting downtown businesses.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Can Downtowns Get Their Buzz Back?

Updated liquor laws allow visitors to shop, sip, and stroll in specially designated districts. By Kevin Hardy

HOLLY SMITH MOUNT wanted to be first.

Smith Mount, chair of the city council in Huntington, West Virginia, was determined to see her community launch the state's initial outdoor drinking zone—an idea made possible only after the legislature changed the state's alcohol law last year.

"I will fully admit I'm very competitive," she says. "And I told the mayor, 'I want to be first on this one.'"

So, when Huntington's downtown drinking district launched last fall, Smith Mount aimed to be at the front of the line to grab a beer from a local taphouse. The new program sanctions open containers of alcohol within designated boundaries officially known as a Private Outdoor Designated Area.

The hope is that by allowing people to grab a drink and linger, they'll spend more time and money downtown.

"To me, this was just a cherry on top of our already thriving downtown," Smith Mount says. "It's a way to kind of get people outside, get people socializing, and ramp up the economy even more."

In recent years, several states have relaxed alcohol consumption laws to allow communities to create their own limited

drinking zones. They aim to revitalize downtown cores hollowed out by the changing nature of retail and the post-pandemic loss of office workers.

North Carolina cities have been creating outdoor "social zones" since Democratic Governor Roy Cooper signed a new law in 2021. Dozens of Ohio communities big and small have created Designated Outdoor Refreshment Areas, which the legislature sanctioned in 2015 to allow people to walk around freely with a beer, wine, or cocktail. Communities in Kansas and Indiana are exploring or creating new areas after legislatures in both states changed their laws last year.

Little public opposition

Aside from bringing foot traffic to shops and restaurants, officials say the success of the new districts reveals the need to update antiquated liquor laws that long banned public consumption in most places to try to reduce public intoxication and drunk driving. While some critics have raised concerns about the new districts' potential to promote drinking, crime, or littering, organizers across the country say they have largely been adopted without incident.

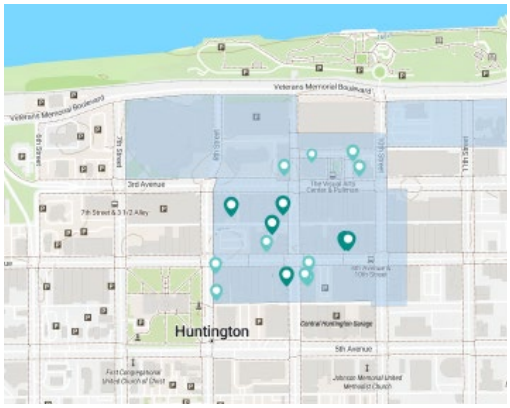
In West Virginia's second-largest city, officials said the drinking district faced little public opposition.

Huntington, a city of about 47,000, is home to Marshall University. On football game days, the area around campus is already "basically open container," Smith Mount says.

The district is open on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from April to October. But Smith Mount notes the effort was already so successful that city leaders are looking at expanding the season.

The Private Outdoor Designated Area isn't a free-for-all. Only licensed bars and restaurants can sell drinks, which must be served in clearly marked cups—no red Solo cups allowed. Drinks must be consumed within the district's boundaries. And store owners can choose to opt in or out.

So far, the city hasn't heard of any problems with the program, officials have said.



Huntington, West Virginia's Private Outdoor Designated Area map shows licensed establishments that sell drinks (dark teal) and the boutiques, bakeries, galleries, and bookstores that welcome visitors with beverages.

'This is just the start'

In the northern stretches of Topeka, Kansas, Redbud Park is home to sculpture gardens and bright murals. Once a month, the park turns into a concert venue for the area's First Friday art walks.

But those performances so far have been alcohol-free, says Thomas Underwood, executive director of the Northern Topeka Arts & Entertainment District.

This year, the legislature allowed communities to apply for Common Consumption Area permits that don't require street closures. The Kansas Department of Revenue reports the state has licensed 32 common consumption areas, in a mix of tiny towns, larger cities, and booming suburbs.

Kansas Republican State Representative Tory Blew was among those who supported the change in state law. She sits on the board of Great Bend Alive, a nonprofit that hosts a monthly Friday evening event in downtown Great Bend, a city of about 15,000 in the middle of the state.

Called Fridays on Forest, the event has been held on a side street as Great Bend's Main Street happens to be a state highway—making street closures there prohibitively difficult. So, organizers have closed down Forest Street to bring in food trucks, games, and alcohol.

Great Bend is currently exploring ways to expand the seasonal event now that the state law has changed. In her community, the consumption area is part of a wider effort to rejuvenate downtown. Younger people are moving back or into town, bringing new coffee shops and a brewery.

"We've got a great start with what we've done so far with the common consumption district," Blew says. "I think this is just the start of the momentum."

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

COURTESY CITYOFHUNTINGTONCOM/PODA

PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLANS

Dave Amos Brings Planning to the People

COURTESY DAVE AMOS

SINCE 2017, Dave Amos has been sharing his excitement for planning through his YouTube series that answers questions like "Why do so many U.S. cities have gridded streets?" Having worked as a practitioner and now as a professor at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, he has a real knack for making urban design accessible, fun, and popular. His channel, "City Beautiful," regularly logs millions of views on its videos.

Amos joined APA's Meghan Stromberg for a conversation on the *People Behind the Plans* podcast, talking about why planning is having a moment with younger audiences, what makes a video go viral, and how planners can use social media to engage with communities. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

STROMBERG: Before earning your PhD, you worked for a consulting firm. Why did you switch from practitioner to academic?
AMOS: When I was in the profession, I would be writing policies to put into plans, and I kept wondering, "How do we know these will be effective policies? These are untested ideas." And I thought this field is filled with opportunities for more research and knowledge. So, I just took the leap. Having that professional experience before I became a professor—I don't know if I could do my job without it.

STROMBERG: What inspired you to take your classroom to YouTube?
AMOS: Part of my job as a practitioner was briefing advisory boards, explaining things like complete streets or healthy communities, and I just wished that there was a YouTube video I could show them. Then as a PhD student, I taught "Intro to City Planning," and I thought, "This is information that everybody could find interesting." So, I just married the content I had developed for my intro class with the need I had identified as a professional and gave it a shot.

STROMBERG: Why did you call your channel "City Beautiful"?
AMOS: The name came as a reaction to the fact that a lot of people don't think cities are beautiful or are dangerous places you shouldn't go. I wanted to bring across a positive message that cities are the habitats that humans create for themselves and they're beautiful in both positive and negative ways.

STROMBERG: Social media can be fickle. How do you make sure your message is conveyed?
AMOS: Seeing cities through a lens of diversity and equity is important, and that's something I try to sneak into videos. On YouTube, sometimes it's hard to address certain topics head-on. I have not found a way to communicate climate change, for example, in a way that makes people really want to click on that video. So, I try to focus on this: who are you planning for, who benefits, and how equitable are the results?

STROMBERG: What do you think makes a video take off? The one on Gary, Indiana, for example, has four times as many views as some of your other episodes.
AMOS: I'm really proud of that Gary video. You can't choose videos that go viral. I'm happy that one did.

The origin story for that video is kind of terrible because there are YouTube channels out there that are basically painting cities in a very negative light, through a very racialized lens. They've done some

Q&A

HEAR THE FULL STORY

Want to learn more about this YouTube classroom? Scan the QR code below or go to planning.org/podcasts for Dave Amos's episode of *People Behind the Plans*, APA's podcast series about urban designers.

hit pieces on Gary that were so ridiculous. I felt like I needed to respond with the Gary I knew.

I find that videos about concrete things work better because it's a visual medium, so highway teardowns or street redesigns or infrastructure get more clicks than something on schools or equity or climate change. I believe the mission of "City Beautiful" is to educate as many people as I can, but I want to give them a broad education.

STROMBERG: Why do you think urban planning is having a moment with new, diverse, and younger audiences?
AMOS: I think there's always been a latent interest in city planning across all generations, but we don't get exposed to this education. Gen Z is lucky because they're online at a time when there's content that can feed that interest. And young people are coming up against the realities of challenges that can be solved by better urban planning. My students have a hard time paying for housing. They may want to bike to campus, but they can't because the infrastructure isn't great. They're coming up against the old ways of doing things, and they're finding it doesn't work for them anymore. They're ready to upend the status quo. They're more empowered than ever.

STROMBERG: How would you like to see planners use social media to connect with their communities and share their work?
AMOS: Planners need to be aware that social media is just media for most people. One of the best ways I've seen social media being used is in the city of San Luis Obispo. Before a council meeting, the city will tell you all the topics on the agenda in an Instagram-friendly format. And then later while you're scrolling, they'll tell you everything that happened at the council meeting. Being in the flow of everybody's feed is really important. You just need to provide the information where people are.

Meghan Stromberg is APA's editor in chief.

COURTESY NETFLIX

NOW STREAMING

An Homage to Everyday Workers for the 21st Century

Obama's Emmy-winning docuseries focuses on the voices and humanity of workers, allowing lived experiences to take center stage. By Ezra Haber Glenn

STUDS TERKEL'S 1974 *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* was an instant classic. The book presented interviews with everyday Americans talking about their jobs—everyone from police officers and welders to bank tellers and even a piano tuner. It was shortlisted for the National Book Award and adapted as a Broadway musical.

The text was required reading for a generation of sociologists, political scientists, union organizers, journalists, and grassroots activists concerned with the plight of the working class. It also attracted the attention of urban planners, politicians, and policy makers eager to make sense of labor, management, industrial relations, and job creation during a period of profound transformation in the U.S. economy.

Over the intervening 50 years, the fundamentals of our economy have shifted so profoundly that a fresh take is in order. And now we have one: a documentary from former President Barack Obama's Higher Ground Productions and Netflix.

Directed by Caroline Suh (*Salt Fat Acid Heat*) and hosted by Obama, the four-part Emmy–award winning docuseries, *Working: What We Do All Day*, delivers an essential update to Terkel's book. The series focuses on the voices and humanity of workers, allowing these people and their lived experiences to take center stage. Studies and data may provide important background for planners to think about job losses, manufacturing transitions, and shifting demographics, but real-world workers talking about their lives put faces to these statistics.

In addition to excellent interviews, a fresh filmmaking style, and punchy humor, Obama and Suh have provided thoughtful organization to help make sense of our new economy. The episodes focus on different levels of workers—from front-line service staff and gig workers to management, professional, and creative class workers. By tracing these jobs across different sectors, we understand the roles played by everyone as part of the whole, as well as the conflicts and contradictions that may be baked into the dynamics of work.

The film traces patterns back to the Great Depression and New Deal policies, changes to global manufacturing, American lifestyles during and following World War II, and the growth of new industries related to computing and biotechnology.

As planners continue to reassess many aspects of communities in the shadow of COVID-19—and in anxious anticipation of emerging artificial intelligence bots—making sense of these changes is as important as ever.

And, as every good planner knows, listening directly to the voices of our friends, neighbors, and constituents is the first step in understanding.

Former President Barack Obama interviews a home care aide in the Emmy-award winning docuseries *Working: What We Do All Day.* The docuseries is available to stream on Netflix.

Ezra Haber Glenn is Planning's *regular film reviewer. He teaches at MIT's Department of Urban Studies & Planning and writes about cities and film. Follow him at urbanfilm.org.*

Visitors soak up the sun at the five-acre Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York City. Parks and other public spaces enliven downtowns and draw people together.
COURTESY MITCHELL SILVER

TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

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INFRASTRUCTURE

HOW TO LEVERAGE PARKS FOR ECONOMIC VITALITY

People-centered places may be our best bet for reviving struggling city centers. *By Carol Coletta and Mitchell Silver,* FAICP

THE ECONOMIC circumstances of cities and their downtowns have recently shifted significantly—and, in most cases, for the worse. The specter of fewer office workers, declining retail sales, and rising commercial real estate vacancies requires a radical reimagining of what downtowns can and should be.

Some cities are rethinking their downtowns by exploring the conversion of empty office buildings to housing or hosting large events. But we need more than new housing and Taylor Swift concerts to revive downtowns. Thoughtful and strategic investments in the places we all own together—our parks, community centers, and streets—may turn out to be some of the smartest moves American cities can make.

In Memphis, Tennessee, an initiative called Reimagining the Civic Commons has brought together the public, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector to collaboratively invigorate multiple public spaces along the Mississippi River—all within walking distance of downtown. First came Fourth Bluff Park and River Garden, followed by a complete overhaul of the city's historic Cossitt Library. And over Labor Day weekend in 2023, Memphis opened the newly transformed 30-acre Tom Lee Park.

These rejuvenated downtown spaces in Memphis are connected to some impressive results: tens of thousands of new visitors, an increase in the number of people living downtown, new hotel rooms, and more retail space being leased.

Here are three ways downtowns can leverage public space for economic success and vitality:

1 **BECOME AN EXPERIENCE.** Many downtowns are suffering because they've become inconvenient and dismal. In place of empty downtown streets, unappealing office spaces, and little viable retail, downtowns must become delightful,

attractive places that offer experiences unavailable anywhere else.

Public space has been a priority for public, private, and philanthropic partners working together in downtown Detroit for the past two decades. Collective investments and collaborative hard work have transformed the Riverfront into beautiful public spaces, including the three-and-a-half-mile RiverWalk and world-class parks. Two Detroit public spaces were recently named the best in the country, and investment continues with a freshly opened greenway and a new waterfront park under construction.

2 RECLAIM STREETS FOR PEOPLE. About 15 percent of a city's footprint is devoted to parks and public space, while 25 percent is dedicated to streets and sidewalks. To recapture space for people, New York City (NYC) created the Parks without Borders initiative, which connects parks, sidewalks, and streets into a seamless public realm. NYC Mayor Eric Adams also appointed Ya-Ting Liu as the first chief public realm officer, tasked with reimagining public space for people. While major projects have been announced by the city, smaller projects like extending sidewalks, particularly on oversize streets, and claiming parking spaces with outdoor furniture and planters enable quick transformations. For example, many of New York's outdoor dining sheds (covered tables and seating used by restaurants) located in on-street parking areas are now permanent, and regularly scheduled neighborhood "play streets" give children access to car-free open space.

3 MAKE DIVERSITY A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE. Parks and public spaces should be welcoming places to everyone—regardless of age, race, ability, or gender. When designed and operated to bridge divides, these spaces also can contribute to economic success for the community. Research shows that when poor children live in places where people have more diverse social connections (particularly connections that transcend incomes), they have a greater chance of escaping poverty. Given the elevated levels of economic segregation in our cities, downtown public spaces also are one of the best chances to draw together people of diverse backgrounds, demonstrated by Memphis's River Garden, which attracts nearly 500 people from 40 different zip codes for Tuesday evening yoga.

Even if your city's downtown revival strategy is built upon converting office space to housing, you'll need to create outdoor and community spaces that interest and appeal to potential residents. High-quality public spaces are what make dense living enjoyable. When a public park is your backyard and the library down the street serves as your office space, downtown living can be enticing for people looking for a place to call home.

Of course, these places must be well-managed and kept clean and welcoming. Downtown public spaces will only be desirable if people feel safe and comfortable and not confronted with fear and chaos in their surroundings.

Visitors to Fourth Bluff Park in Memphis enjoy the annual Soulin' on the River summer concert series. Rejuvenated downtown spaces in Memphis are connected to tens of thousands of new visitors, an increase in the number of people living downtown, new hotel rooms, and more retail space being leased.

COURTESY MEMPHIS RIVER PARKS PARTNERSHIP

Downtowns will not likely fill up with office workers in the foreseeable future, but they can become something new and welcoming for the community. This moment, the here and now, requires investments and project imagination that connect people across diverse backgrounds. Now is the time to move forward with downtowns for people, powered by thoughtful planning and public space.

Carol Coletta is the president and CEO of Memphis River Parks Partnership. Mitchell Silver, FAICP, is the former parks commissioner of New York City and now serves as a principal at McAdams, a design and engineering firm.

TECH

4 OPEN-SOURCE TOOLS FOR MULTIMODAL PLANNING

APA's Technology Division shares tools that help pave the way for transportation solutions. *By Lian A. Plass, AICP, and Isabel Youngs*

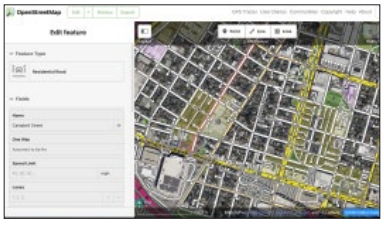
THERE IS A GROWING call to action for cities to lower motor vehicle emissions and enhance the quality of life for pedestrians, bicyclists, and strap-hangers. Despite decades of complete streets guidance, however, incomplete data and a lack of affordable up-to-date planning tools have hampered the ability of communities to identify and analyze multimodal network improvements, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2022 report to Congress.

As existing tools become obsolete, planners need new technology solutions to optimize and manage mobility systems in real time. Those tools can also help to meet multiple goals for mobility, land use, transportation, and access that address climate, congestion, health, and economic vitality. The landscape is also changing, as micromobility options replace short trips of three to five miles or less and transit's "last mile" radius widens, thanks to power-assisted bicycles and scooters.

These shifts, though, require safe and convenient infrastructure supported by thoughtful land use, as well as data and tools that empower planners to create more informed, effective, and innovative transportation solutions.

OPENSTREETMAP

DATA

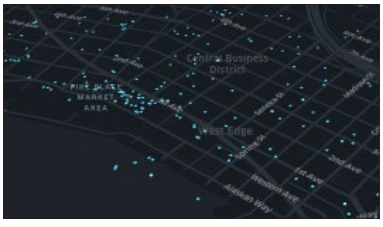


OpenStreetMap (OSM) data can play a crucial role in achieving the goals of the 15-minute-city concept, where cities provide crucial services within a 15-minute walk or bike ride for all residents. OSM is a decades-long project, supported by a global community of volunteer mappers, that provides free map data from around the world. Up to 5 million contributions of local knowledge are made to OSM every day, and the data includes features and attributes such as road lanes and their speed limits; locations of trails, paths, and bus stops; bus routes; and much more. OSM is a valuable public resource, and dozens of major companies, including Amazon, Apple, Google, Uber, and Microsoft, have leveraged the data to improve their products. There also is a rich ecosystem of resources for integrating OSM data into planning projects, ranging from raw downloads (Overpass Turbo and Geofabrik), open-source GIS (geographic information system) plug-ins (QuickOSM), and coding language packages for R (osmdata and osmplotr) and Python (OSMnx). Each of these resources allows planners to visualize, analyze, and interpret the street network and other physical features.

COST: ● Free
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No
RESOURCE FORMATS: Geospatial datasets

OVERTURE MAPS FOUNDATION

DATA



Founded in late 2022, Overture Maps Foundation is a partnership of multiple technology companies that aims to provide free access to a variety of detailed place-based data, including points of interest, buildings, administrative boundaries, and transportation networks. Overture Maps incorporates data from OpenStreetMap and blends in additional data sources from contributors such as Esri and TomTom. After checking the accuracy of this data, Overture Maps organizes it in a way that's easier to connect and use, providing key benefits in the form of better reproducibility, data linkage, and scalability. For example, it makes connecting proprietary travel demand or curb management data to the street network efficient and allows it to be replicated across regions and cities using the same code. That means applications built using these tools are easier to share

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

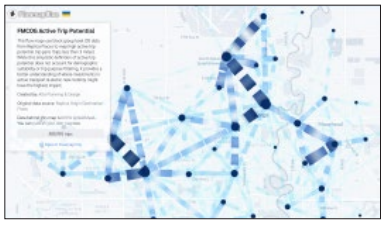
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ILLUSTRATIONS: KATHRYN RATHKE; COURTESY OVERTURE MAPS FOUNDATION; ISABEL YOUNGS

with others, as well as more adaptable to larger study areas or multiple projects.

COST: ● Free
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● Yes (SQL)
RESOURCE FORMATS: Geospatial datasets

FLOWMAPBLUE

DATA | VISUALIZER



Another tool for creating interactive transportation flows is FlowmapBlue. This open-source, web-based application enables planners to identify the starting and ending points of journeys. It works by using a simple template data structure to generate 2-D interactive maps. In FlowmapBlue, users can specify clustering levels and add animations, improving user experience. It also enables URL sharing and embedding for greater exposure and public engagement. There also is an open-source FlowmapBlue widget for the R programming language that can be used for developing customized applications through Shiny, an R package for building interactive web apps. Pairing the tool with Shiny allows users to filter data, observing how trip patterns change depending on underlying trip characteristics such as travel modes, trip distances, travel purposes, or demographics. This makes it easier for planners to make decisions that improve access based on community needs.

COST: ● Free
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No
RESOURCE FORMATS: Geospatial

KEPLER.GL

DATA | VISUALIZER

To improve the multimodal network, it is important to study not only where people start and end trips, but also to assess their routes to find efficiencies. However, visualizing trip flows has historically been a difficult task. Trip data is often enormous, overlapping, and hard to interpret from static maps. Kepler.gl is an open-source, web-based application for visualizing geospatial data, including trip flows. It can quickly render millions of points representing thousands of trips and group data based on location, making it easier to view trip patterns regardless of the size of the study area. These features help to drive better decision-making and can be shared widely through URLs or HTML embeds. Kepler.gl also has a convenient widget library for use in Jupyter Notebooks, an interactive development environment.

COST: ● Free
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No
RESOURCE FORMATS: Geospatial

Lian A. Plass, AICP, is a senior manager of the Urban Resilience program at the Urban Land Institute and vice chair of the APA Technology Division board. Isabel Youngs is a civic data analyst for the civic analytics team at Alta Planning + Design. Previously, she worked as a transportation planner and data specialist at HDR and as a visiting professor at Georgetown University, where she taught data analytics in urban planning. *The authors thank Lisa Nisenson and the APA Transportation Planning Division's Justin Porter, AICP, for their contributions to this article.*

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

FROM LEFT: COURTESY ALTA PLANNING + DESIGN ON BEHALF OF FARGO-MOORHEAD COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS USING DATA FROM REPLICA; COURTESY ARC-KEPLER.GL

The tactics that planners use to carry out successful community engagement efforts are the same ones that talented leaders use to build trust in relationships.

AZMANL/E+/GETTY IMAGES

THE PROFESSION

YOU'RE IN CHARGE NOW. HERE'S HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT.

Be authentic and build trust to shift from peer to supervisor, handle age gaps, and more. *By Justice Wahid Cotton, AICP, and Enessa H. Janes, PHD, AICP*

YOU'VE JUST BECOME a team leader or supervisor for the first time. It can feel both exhilarating and scary to be leading a department. Relax and remember that other planners have been in your shoes. Here is some advice from people who know just how you feel.

Bring your whole self to work

Authenticity is truly a leadership strength. Associated with honesty and integrity, it allows your team to gain trust in you and your decisions.

Many people struggle with discomfort when stepping into a new role and the magnitude of its responsibilities. That can feed into feelings of imposter syndrome, but achieving your career aspirations can and should be a catalyst for self-reflection. Taking time to identify why you feel out of place is a good place to start building awareness and feeling comfortable with being yourself.

Bridge age gaps with respect

Supervising people who are older than you can be daunting, But planners are uniquely equipped to lead diverse teams comprising multiple disciplines, ages, and identities because of our training in the theory and practice of community engagement.

Community engagement is founded on the principles of inclusion, collaboration, and shared purpose; openness and learning; transparency; and trust. The tactics that planners use to carry out successful community engagement efforts are the same ones that talented leaders use to build trust in relationships. Applying those principles and skills to your new role can help generate buy-in and respect.

Regardless of an age gap, productive working relationships are founded on trust and mutual respect, so leverage your training to establish trusting relationships with your team members.

From a peer to the boss

The shift from being a peer in the workplace to being a supervisor can negatively affect team dynamics, but it doesn't have to.

Start by learning how individual team members prefer to be coached and talk about their communication preferences. Remain highly approachable, but set boundaries through your behavior (for example, by limiting social interactions with your team outside the office).

Having worked with your team members for some time, you might already be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Take advantage of that, but be mindful of perceived favoritism.

Build up expertise and maximize team performance by developing the potential in individual contributors, approaching issues openly and collaboratively, identifying opportunities to upskill your team, and demonstrating your willingness to address persistent departmental issues head-on.

There are other behaviors you can model to gain trust and build respectful working relationships. Demonstrate that you understand, respect, and value your team members' expertise by giving credit where it is due. Be transparent. You don't need to share everything, but err on the side of overcommunicating the department's direction, vision, and expectations. And follow through if you say you're going to do something.

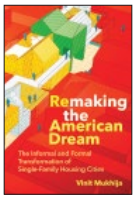
Finally, accept that vulnerability is a key element in building trust. This is where authenticity as a leader often is established.

Justice Wahid Cotton, AICP, is the Auburn, Alabama, director of planning. Enessa H. Janes, PHD, AICP, is the director of Vibrant Community and Neighborhoods for Arvada, Colorado. This article is based on First Year Directorship: Drinking from the Firehose, a Passport course available with a subscription.

PLANNERS LIBRARY

WHAT WE'RE READING: PICKS FROM *JAPA*

From an exploration of single-family housing to homelessness and coyotes in the streets.

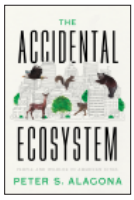


Remaking the American Dream: The Informal and Formal Transformation of Single-Family Housing Cities
By Vinit Mukhija, 2022, MIT Press,
328 pp, $54 paper

THERE IS MUCH more simmering within single-family enclaves than meets the eye, argues *Remaking the American Dream*. Vinit Mukhija writes about the evolution of single-family neighborhoods in their totality, treating the construction, removal, and (all too rare) regularization of informal housing units alongside the legal addition of second and third units as all part of the same story. Its rich collection of case studies includes detailed accounts of important, but seldom-told episodes of planning history, such as Vancouver's long road toward embracing additional units on R1 lots and the California state government's decades-long cat-and-mouse game with municipalities seeking to block accessory dwelling units.

This book will guide planning practitioners working to bring zoning reform and housing choice to U.S. neighborhoods. The environmental, social, and fiscal pressures to release single-family enclaves from their straitjackets in coming years seem sure to intensify.

—Review by Jake Wegmann, University of Texas at Austin

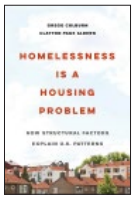


The Accidental Ecosystem: People and Wildlife in American Cities
By Peter S. Alagona, 2022,
University of California Press,
296 pp, $23.20 paper

FORTY MEMBERS OF a midtown neighborhood association are heatedly debating what to do about the herd of javelina that dig up gardens and terrorize people out walking their dogs. One woman says she is so frightened of the boar-like creatures that she won't leave her house. So far, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the police department, and Pima County Animal Control all say, "Live with it."

How did we get to this situation? Peter S. Alagona—in his very readable book *The Accidental Ecosystem*—recounts the tale. Stories of a puma in Southern California, a sea lion in Seattle, a bear in New Jersey, coyotes in Chicago, and bats in Austin, Texas, bring to our attention how urban encounters with wild animals occur nationwide. Ultimately, Alagona calls for coexistence—"to see the good in wildlife and to work to coexist with it, even with creatures that can sometimes be annoying, is also to see good in human kind, to work toward a more just, humane and sustainable future." This is an excellent book for planners thinking about the built environment's setting in the broader ecosystem.

—Review by Margot Garcia, FAICP, Virginia Commonwealth University



Homelessness Is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns
By Gregg Colburn and
Clayton Page Aldern, 2022,
University of California Press,
284 pp, $29.95 paper

IN THEIR BOOK *Homelessness Is a Housing Problem*, Gregg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern ask why the size of the homeless population varies so widely from place to place. They test a range of commonly invoked reasons to explain high levels of homelessness: favorable wintertime temperatures, generous social services, and unusually high levels of poverty. But they settle on a simple, straightforward conclusion: "Regional variation in rates of homelessness can be explained by the costs and availability of housing."

Homelessness Is a Housing Problem should erase any doubt about the powerful role of housing markets in creating homelessness. Written with straightforward prose and digestible empirical analyses, this book will serve as a useful resource for planners seeking to dispel myths about homelessness and zero in on its causes.

—Review by Brian McCabe, Georgetown University

These reviews are excerpted from the Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA). *Thank you to our reviewers: Margot Garcia, FAICP, Brian McCabe, and Jake Wegmann.* JAPA *book reviews were reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, tandfonline.com.*

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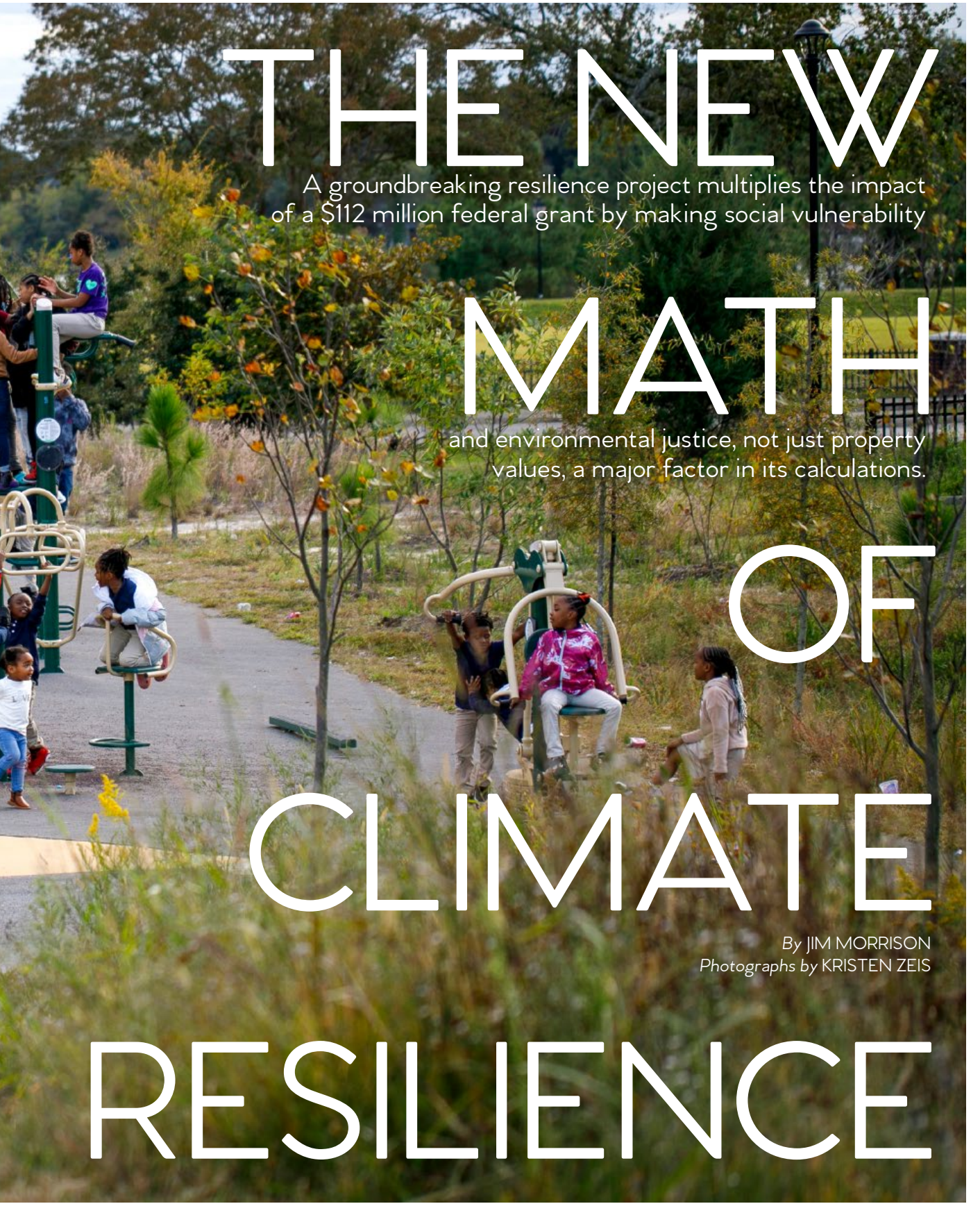
PASSPORT

Built as part of the Ohio Creek Project, Resilience Park is designed to flood and then allow water to slowly seep into the ground. The new park connects the Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village neighborhoods.

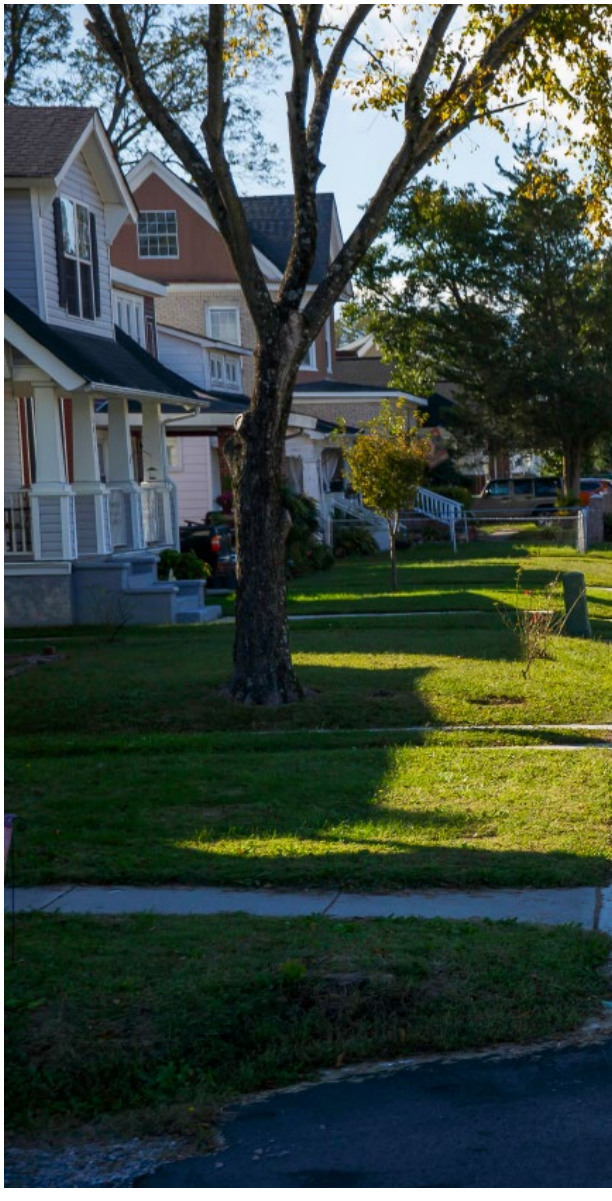


THE NEW MATH OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE

A groundbreaking resilience project multiplies the impact of a $112 million federal grant by making social vulnerability and environmental justice, not just property values, a major factor in its calculations.

By JIM MORRISON
Photographs by KRISTEN ZEIS

When architecture and engineering students started asking neighbors in Chesterfield Heights about flooding, Karen Speights was ready.



She'd moved back into her childhood home in the largely Black neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia, in 2008 with a plan to stay only a few years to help her aging mother. Not long after the move, a nor'easter hit. She and her mother were on the first floor eating dinner when they saw water flowing underneath the house through the floor vents. But they weren't worried. The house had never flooded.

Within minutes, though, they were splashing about in water over their shoes, moving things higher as small shocks nipped at them when their low outlets filled with water. "It came in so fast, just like a wave," Speights remembers.

Insurance paid for repairs. A year and a half later, it happened again when Hurricane Irene smashed into the city.

That storm triggered a series of activities—Norfolk winning a $112 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) National Disaster Resilience Competition in 2016 and the implementation of the Ohio Creek Watershed Project, which was completed in 2023. The latter effort is different in a few ways, including its start as a student project and the deliberate and thoughtful community engagement that Speights and her neighbors provided.

It also made social vulnerability—rather than just property values—a key driver in deciding where to invest in resiliency. In fact,

Clockwise, from above: Permeable pavers on a neighborhood street lined with historic homes; bioswales along sidewalks that help to filter and slow runoff; a free community library; and Karen Speights on her porch. In the Ohio Creek Project, houses were not raised because doing so would have harmed the front porch culture that is so important to residents.

in the city's HUD proposal, it calculated that social benefits would provide 49 percent of the project's value, while less than five percent came from property protection.

Norfolk officials and others expect Ohio Creek may now be a model for how planners approach resiliency planning, and it's happening at a time when federal funding of water resource investments is getting a second look. In February, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed a rule change requiring that environmental, social, and economic benefits be considered for federal water resource projects.

The start of a solution

The students who spoke to Chesterfield Heights residents were from nearby Hampton University and Norfolk's Old Dominion University. The beginnings of a solution to the flooding and other problems related to sea level rise, and the impacts of climate change in the area came in the form of the students' Tidewater Rising Resiliency Design Challenge project—developed by a local nonprofit, Wetlands Watch, in conjunction with nearby universities. They met with civic leagues, explained their plan to canvass residents, and then went door-to-door gathering experiences.

"They went through the neighborhood talking to us, and that's when everything really took off," Speights says.

It turned into an innovative way to calculate the benefits of a resilience project by going beyond property value, the usual focus of analyses used for federal projects funded by the Army Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "Investments should prioritize the most vulnerable first," noted an Urban Institute 2021 case study report. "Flood mitigation infrastructure is, ultimately, a safety net."

The report noted that people with low incomes and people of color "are undervalued and frequently overlooked in public investment." Because nontraditional social and environmental indicators were used in addition to traditional property and economic measures, the report concluded, the Ohio Creek project's benefit-cost ratio was 10 times higher than it would have been in a standard approach.

A VULNERABLE AREA

With land sinking and the water rising, Norfolk has the highest rate of sea level rise on the East Coast, according to a report from the Virginia Institute for Marine Science.

$28,600

The median household income of Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village residents, significantly lower than Norfolk's median of $44,500.

450

The number of privately owned homes protected by the project, in addition to 300 public housing units.

"The breadth of what was included in the considerations was much wider for the Ohio Creek Watershed Project than what we saw for other projects," says Rebecca Marx, a research associate in the Climate and Communities practice area of the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute and a coauthor of the report. "It really hits that there are multiple dimensions of resilience."

That also was the focus of the Army Corps' proposed rule change for water resource investments, announced in February with public comments due by April. The proposed principles, requirements, and guidelines (PR&G) text notes that the "focus on national economic gains sometimes resulted in an unduly narrow benefit-cost comparison of the monetized and quantified effects" of investments. For decades, feasibility studies by the Army Corps have focused on property values.

"The PR&G emphasizes that relevant environmental, social, and economic effects should all be considered and that both quantified and unquantified information will form the basis for evaluating and comparing potential federal investments in water resources," it continues. "This more integrated approach would allow decision makers to view a more complete range of effects of alternative actions and lead to more socially beneficial investments."

Opposite: Chief Resilience Officer Kyle Spencer and team quantified nontraditional project benefits like social cohesion. Above: Tidal wetlands near Grandy Village, a public housing community of 300 units.

Writing a new rulebook

Norfolk has the highest rate of sea level rise on the East Coast, according to a report from the Virginia Institute for Marine Science. Adding to the issue are the area's many creeks and wetlands that have been filled in over three centuries. Today, those creeks flood repeatedly.

Chesterfield Heights sits along Ohio Creek, a tributary of the Elizabeth River, where wave and storm action in recent decades has eroded the shoreline. Isolated from the rest of the city years ago by an interstate, the neighborhood has only two entrances—and one of them often closes because of flooding from storms and high tides.

A century-old neighborhood on the National Register of Historic Places, Chesterfield Heights features interpretations of Colonial Revival and Queen Anne architectural styles. In the Ohio Creek project, the neighborhood is joined by nearby Grandy Village, which has more than 300 public housing units. The two neighborhoods, where the median household income of $28,600 is significantly lower than Norfolk's median of $44,500, are among the city's most socially vulnerable. Most of the 450 houses protected by the project are occupied by people who meet the state's low-to-moderate income definition.

In August 2011, when Hurricane Irene slammed into Virginia, killing five people and leaving 1.1 million without power while causing tens of millions of dollars in damages, it also flooded Karen Speights's house for the second time in almost as many years. Her insurance spent more than $80,000 on repairs.

"They come in, they fix your flooring, they give you some new appliances, they put in some cabinets," Speights says. But that wouldn't stop her house from flooding again. "I was asking the question: What can I do to prevent this?"

As part of the two-phase HUD competition, localities were required to look at both recovering from a disaster—Hurricane Irene, in Norfolk's case—and protecting people and property in the future. HUD didn't specify how to evaluate benefits for proposed projects, so Norfolk staffers pushed the boundaries.

Rather than just considering property values to determine investing in resilience infrastructure, Norfolk also focused on community vulnerability. Looking at everything from mental health effects to environmental benefits to neighborhood cohesion, the city and partners asked who would be most harmed if resilience measures were not taken.

"HUD didn't really write any playbook or restrictions or guidance on how you calculate benefits," says Kyle Spencer, Norfolk's chief resilience officer. "So, we were able to put numbers—quantitative numbers—to things like social

cohesion, environmental justice, you know, those sorts of more maybe ambiguous things."

Norfolk planners and officials, with the help of the firm Arcadis, prepared a 354-page benefit-cost analysis for their application. It evaluated benefits in four categories: resiliency values, such as physical damages; environmental benefits, such as reduced stormwater runoff; social and recreational benefits, such as increased physical activity and reduced mental stress; and economic revitalization, such as redevelopment of the public housing community.

They used a variety of metrics to justify benefits, including the Social Vulnerability Index developed by the University of South Carolina's Hazards Vulnerability & Resilience Institute and FEMA's Hazus program. Methodologies from Earth Economics, economic and health benefit studies by the Trust for Public Land, and the East Carolina University Physical Inactivity Cost Calculator also served as valuable resources.

"The city and their partners really did put together projects that looked across social vulnerability and put together solutions that transform that community," says Emily Steinhilber, director of Climate Resilient Coasts and Watersheds for the Environmental Defense Fund in Virginia, who has followed the project from conception. "I think it's a really unique and shining example of what can be done."

Several interesting circumstances helped the application and the final plan come together. After seeing the university students' presentation, Norfolk city staffers included Chesterfield Heights in a five-day Dutch Dialogues charrette in 2016 and invited the students. The charrette featured representatives from the Royal Netherlands Embassy and Waggonner and Ball Architects, based in New Orleans, who presented design ideas that combined Dutch approaches to "living with the water" with American gray infrastructure expertise. Their ideas became part of the first phase of the competition's application. The city's HUD-approved plan included a combination of gray and green infrastructure.

Paula Shea, AICP, the acting director of planning for the city, says the charrette drove a change in the solutions proposed in the grant application, combining hard infrastructure with nature-based solutions.

Norfolk also benefited during that time from being named one of the first resilient cities in 2013 by the Rockefeller Foundation, a program that provided for a resilience officer and support for identifying and sharing innovative climate crisis strategies before ending in 2019.

Forging bonds with the community

The relationship building that started with the students continued and grew once civic leaders and the city picked up the mantle. Throughout the project, it was cultivated through some 40 meetings and events and quarterly updates mailed to residents.

Zach Robinson—an architectural and urban designer now working as a project manager at Brooklyn Navy Yard, was an architecture student at Hampton University at the time of the project. He went door-to-door in 2014. He says residents originally were skeptical but grew to trust students with encouragement from civic leaders. "I remember being able to have genuine conversations with people," says Robinson, who later worked on the project as a community liaison with Work Program Architects, a design firm hired by the city.

Residents told students that basements were flooding. One house might have a sump pump keeping their basement dry, while a neighbor without one would flood. They heard about the problems getting in and out of the neighborhood when one or both of its two access roads flooded.

"What we learned from going into the community was that these house-by-house solutions often create more problems for other houses that can't keep up with the upgrades," Robinson says. That led to the exploration for neighborhood-wide answers.

The final design incorporated versions of several solutions from the 2016 Tidewater Rising report, including a living shoreline that mitigates flooding. Permeable pavers replace asphalt on one street and bio-retention cisterns along sidewalks filter pollutants and slow runoff. Raising

Above: In addition to green infrastructure elements like a restored shoreline, the project includes a fishing pier and other amenities. Zach Robinson, opposite, a member of the original student project team, stands atop the berm near one of the two new pump stations.

one of the two roads into the neighborhood allows for safe passage, even during storms. Notably, the plan did not recommend raising houses after the students' report said that might endanger the neighborhood's historic status and would sacrifice its "porch culture."

"The residents really appreciated that we actually took the time to talk to them and hang out with them and hear their perspective instead of trying to get an agenda … pushed through," Robinson says.

Extensive engagement continued even after the HUD grant was issued in 2016, although the start of the COVID-19 lockdown two weeks before groundbreaking in 2020 forced a switch to online meetings. That wasn't always easy. Many of the civic league members were older and lacked familiarity with things like Zoom meetings, so the city also used email to keep residents involved, Spencer says.

One example of the project partners' efforts to maintain community engagement—and buy-in—came in 2018. To help residents visualize the changes to come, city workers brought in hay bales and used them to create a mock-up of the proposed berm, Spencer says.

"It's one thing to look at a two-dimensional idea of what a berm looks like, it's another thing to have [it] in front of your house, [changing] that viewshed," says Doug Beaver, who was Norfolk's chief resilience officer when the project began and is now a deputy city manager.

Residents were invited to pick the pavers and the pattern for the permeable street, and although Norfolk city parks typically aren't lit, there is lighting in the new park connecting the two neighborhoods because that was what neighbors wanted. It was "very hands-on" and personal, Spencer says, noting that "a lot of our interactions were in the yards or in the street."

A plan come to life

The Ohio Creek project relies on traditional infrastructure, including 1,000 feet of floodwall, 17,000 feet of stormwater pipes, and two new pump stations. One road was raised and moved, and a tidal gate was added.

Natural solutions include a living shoreline and restored wetlands. Street-side, concrete-lined bioswales planted with perennials retain and slow infiltration of stormwater. A resilience park—designed to flood and then let the water gently seep into the land—connects the two neighborhoods. New amenities include a fishing pier, basketball courts, walking trails, playing fields, and hundreds of new trees.

With construction complete, residents and the city continue to discuss what works. Residents remain unsure about the bioswales, which some say look like weedy ditches.

The Ohio Creek project, Spencer says, remains an experiment in seeing not only what resilience measures work but also how they will be managed in the future. Neither the plan nor the project partners identified the department responsible for the long-term maintenance of those bioswales, for instance, although the stormwater division has since taken them on.

Project costs, including materials, grew as it progressed, and the city also came up against a federal deadline for using the grant. To make it work, the city reassessed the plan and budget and contributed $9 million from a community development block grant and money set aside for flood projects. That brought funding to $121 million. Steinhilber cautions that the cost and the construction's disruption to the neighborhood won't make it easy to replicate. "I hope that we can figure out how to do this across more areas that are at risk," she adds.

As for Chesterfield Heights resident Karen Speights, she's staying. She remodeled her house again, and she recently learned that her flood insurance bill, which once peaked at $5,200 a year, dropped to $948 in 2023.

"I'm here for good. I'm not going anywhere," she says.

Jim Morrison is a freelance writer in Norfolk, Virginia, who often reports about the climate crisis. His stories have appeared in The Washington Post *and* Wired.

THE FINAL PROJECT

An Urban Institute 2021 case study report examining several projects called Ohio Creek an example of an innovative way to calculate the benefits of a resilience project by going beyond property values.

10x higher

The project's benefit-cost ratio, compared to a standard approach. Social and environmental indicators were used in addition to traditional property and economic measures.

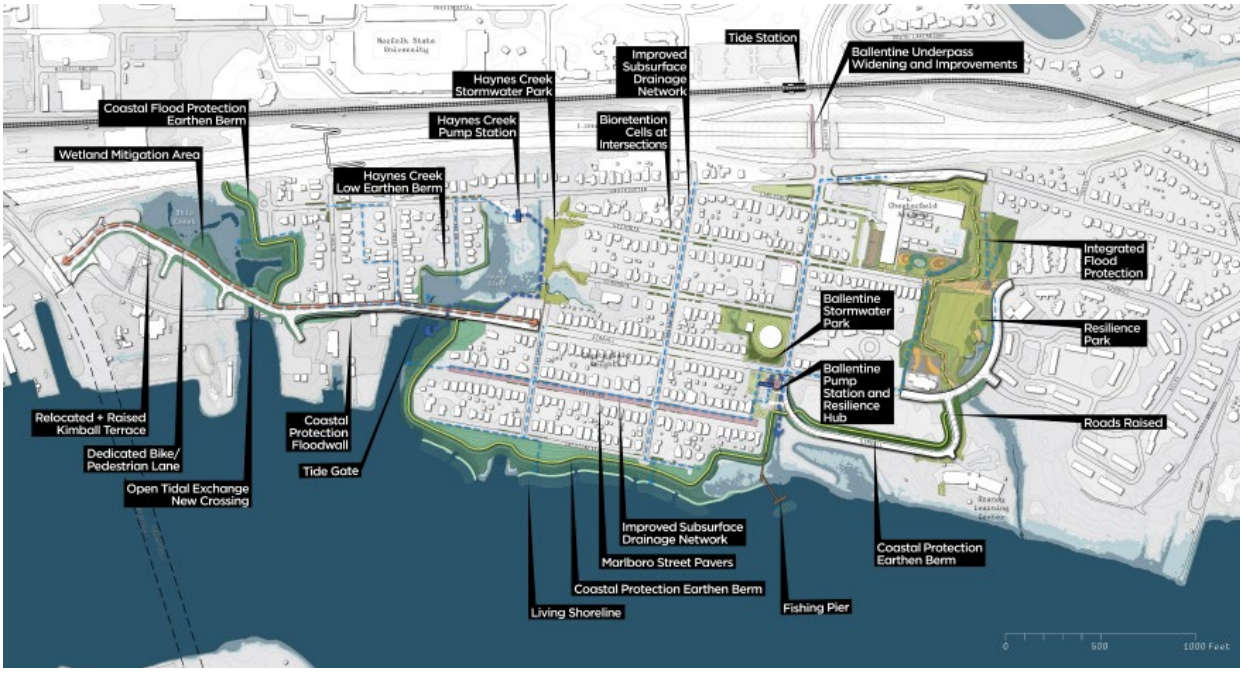
5,000

Linear feet of a new 11-foot-high berm that protects the region. Also built: Two pump stations, 2,000 feet of living shoreline, a fishing pier, basketball courts, walking trails, and playing fields with underdrains.

$121 M

Total cost of the project, with $112 million coming from a HUD resilience grant.

Clockwise from above: The tidal gate along Kimball Terrace; a project map; and the berm that helps to protect the Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village neighborhoods as part of the Ohio Creek Watershed Project.



MAP: COURTESY WAGGONNER & BALL, A MOFFATT NICHOL STUDIO

Please, Stop YELLING @ Me

From contentious meetings to tricky political dynamics, planners manage conflict every day. Use these 7 takeaways to help you get better at it.

By LINDA MCINTYRE, AICP
Illustrations by ELLICE WEAVER

THE PRACTICE OF planning is so bound up with conflict that many of us consider it part of our day-to-day work. That is even more true at this time of unprecedented tech developments, housing supply and affordability challenges, and historic changes in urban land use.

Further, APA's *2024 Trend Report for Planners,* released in January, continues to note political shifts and polarization as urgent concerns, as have the two previous *Trend Reports*. It points to the "corrosive effects of conspiracy theories on public discourse," anti-government sentiment, politically motivated violence, and declining community cohesion as factors that planners face every day. Add in the usual challenges of contentious projects, hot-button issues, strong personalities, and expected job performance, and the strain of it can tax even the most dedicated planner.

Planners manage conflict every day, but maybe it's time to fine-tune those skills. APA has identified managing conflict as an area where planners can upskill by learning how to positively react, reroute a potentially heated conversation, and take a step back to reorganize. Managing conflict is directly connected to the ability to lead with empathy, among several other upskilling opportunities planners can grasp, like cultural competency, listening, and unlearning.

Read on for some stories from the trenches, with reflections and observations about how conflicts played out. Some names (marked with an asterisk) and identifying details have been changed to enable planners to speak frankly and allow others to learn from their experiences.

A Recipe for Burnout

FITCH BRONSON*, an experienced AICP planner, left a big-city planning job in 2019 for a senior-level position with a smaller, growing city closer to family. But as he soon learned, smaller cities don't make for smaller challenges, especially when a place historically skeptical toward outsiders and urbanism finds itself becoming a burgeoning regional hotspot.

His new job in the planning department put him on the front lines of the development process—managing a team of planners, conducting site-plan reviews, overseeing land-use applications from start to finish, and operating the department's e-filing portal for development applications. "It's a community that, while relatively small in population, is the center of the state economy, is growing and rapidly gaining a skyline, and is nearing a decision point on whether to remain oriented toward tourism or to move toward a new status as a larger city with a more diversified economy and housing market," Bronson says.

Anxiety about change, especially on the part of homeowners spending more time than ever at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, was a frequent source of tension for Bronson and his staff, who went out of their way to answer questions and try to assuage concerns. But over time, their efforts, and the "increasingly coarse" discourse he had already witnessed over nearly 20 years of professional planning, became "a form of emotional labor that could and did take its toll, especially when conversations became tense (or worse, profane, which did happen)."

On the other side, developers frequently complained about the local planning and development process, with steps they termed annoying and onerous. Bronson notes that public-sector planning requires thick skin. "But constant lamentations about 'hurdles,' processing time, and review-queue lengths (as no department is capable of fully scaling up and down rapidly to meet the needs of the real estate market cycle) had a corrosive effect on staff morale, as did the occasional end run around staff to the administration."

Bronson felt he was neglecting his family even when physically present, but giving his all to the job wasn't enough. "I recall calling the city's employee assistance program one morning after an especially brutal night meeting because I needed to talk to someone about how difficult I was finding the work and how hard it was to keep a brave face for the team I led, knowing that emotions are contagious and not wanting to be seen as somehow weak or inadequate," he says. "I wanted to shield them from the difficult interactions because I believed that to be part of the job."

In the end, it was too much. He left that job late last year for a new one with a regional planning organization serving smaller communities, a less adversarial environment with a schedule that leaves him time for family and nonwork pursuits. He's able to use his prior experience

in grant writing and cultivate his interest in technology by building online tools for member communities.

TAKE AWAY 1 **DETACH FROM THE CULT OF WORK.** Bronson advises fellow planners, in addition to spending time on meaningful nonwork activities, to think about work in a detached manner. "Looking back, I was in thrall to the cult of 'workism' that we hear so much about now, identifying with the idea of being a planner in a great city so much that I let the job consume some of the best parts of me, frequently leaving my family with too little on nights and weekends."

TAKE AWAY 2 **KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES AND YOURSELF.** "Reflect regularly on what the work means to you and what your 'red lines' are when it comes to difficult interactions," Bronson says. "When you feel they've been breached and are unable to respond in a way consistent with how you are feeling, due to an imbalance in power dynamics, find someone else with a kind ear to talk to, if possible, because the effects of these interactions can be cumulative."

Stacey White, dean of the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois Chicago, says that this kind of self-awareness and emotional intelligence can serve as a rudder to help navigate difficult situations, even if it doesn't make them easier to bear. And an overly avoidant approach can undermine your goals. For less experienced planners, or those in especially fraught situations, she suggests spending some time on self-assessment to better understand how you manage conflict and develop strategies to help; she recommends a couple of helpful tools (see below).

When Your Best Isn't Enough

ANOTHER FORMER BIG-CITY planner, Regina Nelson*, moved to a public-sector job in a smaller city under new leadership with a mandate for change. She thrived professionally, rising quickly to a high-level position and using every bit of authority she had.

"I saw injustice and felt a responsibility to do something about it," she says. Encouraged to seek funding for projects, she forged ahead,

TOOLS TO HELP MANAGE CONFLICT

There are many online tools available to help you and your colleagues understand—and possibly improve—conflict dynamics. Here are two:

THOMAS-KILMANN CONFLICT MODE INSTRUMENT. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument was developed in 1974 by psychologists Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann. It describes five responses based on relative levels of assertiveness (focus on our own needs, usually plotted on the y axis) and cooperativeness (focus on others' needs, on the x axis). While compromising is obviously an ideal outcome, the goal is to understand your default reactions and what might be driving others' reactions.

The authors revisited the framework in 2007, using larger datasets more finely tuned to reflect differences by gender, ethnic background, and other factors, and found the model robust. It's used by many organizations to manage conflict within a workplace, but it's relevant to the crosscutting nature of planning and its many stakeholders.

STRENGTHS FINDER. Various assessments are available to help you figure out what your workplace strengths are so that you can seek out partners with complementary ones. Most are based on the work of the late psychologist Donald Clifton. His framework is based on 34 themes organized across four domains: strategic thinking, relationship building, influencing, and executing.

The CliftonStrengths tool is now owned by the Gallup consulting firm. Free versions are also available.

working with a colleague to meet the pent-up demand for parks and other public amenities: applying for and managing grants, navigating procurement, and writing contracts. At first, they didn't know what they didn't know. "A construction manager we hired would ask us questions, and we had no clue; we had to research everything."

Much of this work would have ordinarily been done by another department, but those colleagues weren't much help: the department chose not to pursue the projects Nelson and her colleague felt were urgent for the communities they served. And while the community generally supported the projects, "there were so many unaddressed conversations that should have happened before," she says. "I would apologize for the prior neglect on my own. But I wasn't the mayor."

By the time she left the job in 2021, after almost five years, her relationship with the mayor, initially a mentor and a champion, had deteriorated. Exercising the autonomy she'd felt was part of her position made her a target. Still, Nelson has sympathy for the mayor, who was able to do some good in an old-school culture long dominated by machine politics, a micromanaging governor, and optics. "It was a very challenging situation, so I don't want to drag [the mayor] down," she says. "But leading by example would have been a better approach."

TAKE AWAY 3 **PLANNING IS POLITICAL.** Nelson realized how dependent planning is on a well-functioning local government, even in smaller jurisdictions. "You go into this profession to make things better, but I, at least, didn't get any experience in school about how the sausage is made." At a charrette during her time in this job, Nelson says she was approached by a woman who believed the city government was plotting a conspiracy. "I assured her that people didn't communicate with each other well enough to pull that off," she says. "If we could have gotten to conspiracy-level teamwork, we could have done anything!"

Role-playing, something White has used in the classroom, can help in these situations. "The stakes are low; you can use humor," she says. "Even if it feels cringey in the moment, the hope is that people find value later." As a planner myself, I've found that to be true. A decade ago when I was a student, I had a class in which we were assigned roles for a project moving through the discretionary approval process. I realized that, at least in New York City, the council member held the reins, a valuable lesson during my eight years as a planner there.

TAKE AWAY 4 **EVERYTHING STARTS AT THE TOP.** Here, the outcome might have been almost inevitable. Harriet Tregoning was the planning director in Washington, D.C.,

3 SKILLS TO UP YOUR PLANNING PRACTICE

Future-proof your career in an ever-changing world. BY LINDA MCINTYRE, AICP

It's never too late to learn new things—whether technical aptitudes or people skills—or to find novel ways to think about or apply your experiences. To best serve our communities we planners must keep our skills sharp and, when needed, embrace new ones.

Here are some of the skills that APA has identified as relevant to planners. Matching skills with challenges and opportunities in the planning profession will help you align with trends and increase your openness to new ideas and creative growth.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The ability to engage knowledgeably with people across cultures

1 Regions, communities, and even neighborhoods are never monolithic. Engaging comfortably with people from different cultures and working together to envision paths and scenarios for the future set the stage for mutual understanding and consideration of many points of view. Sometimes the first step is communicating in the right language. But translation is more than just words. "When we're involved in translation work, it's not just word-for-word, it's also cultural," says Evelyn Mayo, AICP, the planning director of Texas-based RAYO Planning, whose work centers on cultural competency. "Make sure it's in a context that resonates with people." Authentic connections that foster true inclusivity, she says, require understanding people's actual experiences and cultures, not just the languages they speak.

READ THE FULL STORY

To learn more critical upskilling topics, read *Future-Proof Your Urban Planning Career with These 6 Important Skills* at planning.org/planning or use the QR code below.

UNLEARNING

The ability to change one's mindset to learn and use different methods to analyze and address challenges

2 Growing your mindset to learn and use new and different methods to analyze and address challenges is directly related to successful communication. Sometimes a major constructive change starts with unlearning things that once served you well. The previous mental model you and your colleagues used might no longer be relevant or effective. Just as changing your mindset can be useful in charting your career path, cultivating a growth mindset, and consciously evaluating the efficacy of your default approach, it can help you find or create a new model that can better achieve your goals.

It's not about forgetting; it's about using new information to evolve ways of thinking.

MEDIA LITERACY

The ability to engage constructively with media, including social media, as both a consumer and a subject

3 As housing issues, such as gentrification and displacement, become more prevalent in public conversations, it may be unsettling to see how planning policies and activities are portrayed in news outlets and social media. Simplistic or inaccurate information might even be attributed to the planning department or to you specifically—especially if your job involves working with reporters, or if planning decisions in your community, such as contentious developments or new bike lanes, are frequently in the news. The availability of digital information, and the speed at which we receive it, has touched every profession, including planning. That said, it's important to fine-tune the ability to engage constructively with media, including social media, to ensure your messages are relayed with accuracy. And, as tempting as it might be, planners can't evade the impact of social media by simply saying, "I don't use social media." Community members are actively engaged on these platforms, so planners can't just opt out.

DENIS NOVIKOV/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

from 2007 to 2014, a period of growth after years of decline. "You need good leadership [at the top of an administration] to have successful planning," she says, regardless of a city's size or structure. "A planning director who's a strong leader is nice, but probably not sufficient." A new leader on the scene will probably take time to build a coalition.

"You need alliances to implement plans and to do planning that engages more than a single neighborhood or development site," Tregoning says. She's taken a pass on opportunities that didn't meet those criteria. Other planners might want to consider doing the same.

Sometimes the Planner Takes the Fall

KYLE SAMUELS* WAS an early-career planner when he started an internship in a Midwestern lakefront community with a small year-round population that spikes in the summer and relies heavily on tourism. While many visitors and most seasonal residents are affluent, full-time residents have lower incomes on average, and many are affected by the hot regional real estate market. In 2019, the city brought on a young and energetic new city manager to help steer growth and move much-needed housing and infrastructure projects. Samuels arrived shortly afterward. In March 2020, the sole planner/zoning administrator left, and Samuels went from being an intern to a full-time employee.

The job entailed a wide range of responsibilities. He interpreted and enforced zoning rules, reviewed site plans and permit documents, supported the planning commission and other boards such as the downtown development authority, and more. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic changed almost everything. Once-seasonal residents, now able to work from anywhere, flocked in from more urban settings, along with plenty of newcomers, raising the already strong demand for infrastructure and services.

Samuels rose to the occasion, working long hours with little help, administrative or otherwise, in a place he'd loved since childhood. He and his boss brought a by-the-book ethos to a city hall that had long operated informally.

"The city charter had not been updated, and a decade's worth of changes to ordinances had not been codified," he says. Plans and applications had been signed off with little review, and there was little follow-up on conditional approvals.

The more professional approach was publicly welcomed in city council meetings. But if developers thought the pro-growth tenor of city hall would benefit them, some were disappointed by the renewed attention to statutory and regulatory requirements. Pandemic-related fear and uncertainty also took a toll on residents and businesses. And Samuels was often the lightning rod for interactions, in the office and on-site, that could get very tense. Developers and longtime residents unhappy with the direction complained to the city manager, the city council, and their neighbors, some accusing Samuels of not responding to their questions and applications.

He wasn't the only target of this backlash—after the 2021 local elections, the incumbent mayor, chosen by the council, was pushed out. The new mayor, who had disregarded zoning requirements on his own property, focused his new coalition on the accusations against Samuels, who received little support from the city manager.

Despite excellent performance reviews, a recent pay raise unanimously approved by the council (including the new mayor), and meticulous records detailing his responsiveness, Samuels, without union representation or the funds to engage an attorney, was dismissed in a closed city council session in August 2022. In the wake of coverage by the local press, the city provided a severance payment equivalent to a few months' salary. A planning commissioner who worked with Samuels throughout his tenure and then with a contract planner brought on after Samuels's departure has thought a lot about how a better process might have prevented this outcome. "Code enforcement is a point of conflict in any community, especially a small one where everybody knows each other, and especially when it relates to the community's chief economic engine," he says.

But the situation was exacerbated by the apparent contrast between the predecessor's hands-off approach to issues such as county and state permitting requirements and Samuels's efforts to enforce codes and coordinate with other jurisdictions. "The job of a solo planner can expand to enormous proportions, and its responsibilities require consultation with many professionals to render correct decisions," says the commissioner. The obligation for both the planner and applicants to coordinate wasn't clearly defined. The contract planner worked with the city team to clarify those obligations and regulate ex parte communications.

TAKE AWAY 5

YOU MIGHT BE THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE. Even when lessons are learned, they might come too late. The city's nine-month period without a full-time planner (a new one was hired last May) might have focused minds in city hall, the commissioner says. "Targeted contract support is now

provided to manage the workload for high-effort tasks. A lot depends on these process improvements continuing so the new planner has time to implement enforcement procedures."

He also observes that consultant planners can operate in a more arm's-length manner with a community, which might make it harder to bring personal animus into the situation. He's hopeful that the successor will have an easier time, based on lessons that Samuels learned the hard way. Happily, Samuels landed on his feet, eventually finding another planning job in a jurisdiction ready to embrace change.

TAKE AWAY 6 **READ BETWEEN THE LINES.** "I trusted too much in the laws on the books" to structure his work, Samuels says. He assumed that the laws—and the city manager—would protect him when challenged. The city manager's unwillingness to intervene earlier or ruffle political feathers disappointed him, although those more experienced with local political dynamics might find it unsurprising.

"Sometimes, there's just nothing you can do," White says. "If your idea of how things should happen is very different from the prevailing culture, that could be bad fit for you."

LEARN MORE ABOUT MASTERING CONFLICT

Identify and understand different types of conflict, explore ways to resolve it, and learn how to use facilitation and other skills to manage conflict in public meetings with this Passport course, developed through APA's Upskilling Initiative.

TAKE AWAY 7 **THE OXYGEN MASK CLICHÉ IS TRUE.** "Everything planners do is conflict-laden," White says. "But you need to protect yourself without getting dragged down."

Bronson has some advice: "Take a deep breath. Take up a meditation practice. Find nonwork outlets that allow you to reengage with the other, neglected selves that live inside you, such as hobbies, volunteer work, exercise, or other nourishing activities. Disconnect when out of the office and don't read emails when on vacation unless your role absolutely demands it," he says. "If you are unable to detach, rest, and recharge, then you are on a path that may well end in burnout. All it takes is one negative email read on vacation to sour a time that should have otherwise been yours to enjoy.

"And remember why you became a planner to begin with. Your planning practice is bigger than any one role you have during the course of a decades-long career, and if you need to shift to something else within the planning world to find professional peace and happiness, the profession is broad enough that it can probably accommodate that in one form or another."

Linda McIntyre, AICP, is a professional planner and a regular contributor to Planning.

New Plans to Age in Grace

By considering the needs of a burgeoning senior population, planners can promote creative and community-focused housing options.

By PATRICK SISSON

Independence Branch Library and Apartments, built in 2019, is a six-story mixed-use development in Chicago's Irving Park neighborhood that features 44 units of affordable rental housing for seniors.
COURTESY JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS

WHEN TODAY'S OLDER ADULTS THINK ABOUT HOW TO SPEND THEIR GOLDEN years, the picture they paint is more active and energetic than previous generations. Building new housing to accommodate these more engaged, community-focused older adults often requires forethought and energy on the part of builders.

Examples of this new take on senior living can be found across the country. In Loveland, Colorado, efforts are underway to build a pocket neighborhood called Kallimos Communities, envisioned as a small, walkable, multigenerational village. It's currently clouded by knotty regulations, overlapping agency involvement, and planning challenges. After more than a year of proposals and negotiation, the project is making progress—but construction hasn't started.

"It's outside the box, and we don't fit inside the box, so we're working with a lot of entities to create a new box," says Megan Marama, chief operating officer of Kallimos. The company plans to submit a final plan in early 2024 and hopes to use that momentum to push through the design and development processes.

More of these types of projects need to break ground—and fast. A severe shortage of affordable and accessible housing for America's oldest adults, exacerbated by the same kinds of zoning and building code challenges hampering overall housing supply, is getting worse as the nation's senior population rapidly expands. Urban planners will need to use creative solutions and new approaches to planning and zoning to prioritize the creation of new, age-friendly housing in communities.

"Frankly, planners and many others have been able to get by for years by not necessarily focusing on aging needs because there has been a relatively small percentage of older adults in the overall population," says Rodney Harrell, vice president of family, home, and community for AARP's Public Policy Institute. "That's going to change when well over 20 percent of the population will soon be over 65."

The coming crash of the 'silver tsunami'

The nation's overall housing supply already faces a severe shortage and challenges, according to the report *America's Rental Housing 2024* by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS), as the number of renter households spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities has reached a new high of 22.4 million, while the median age of renters is now 44.

There's a significant shortage of affordable, accessible, and age-friendly housing for the nation's senior population, which is set to rapidly expand in a demographic shift being called the "silver tsunami." The number of Americans aged 65 and older in the U.S. has soared by more than 34 percent in the past decade, while the country's housing supply hasn't kept pace.

The problem will only be exacerbated, says Jennifer Molinsky, a former planner and current project director of the Housing an Aging Society Program at JCHS. As the overall senior population increases in average age, there likely will be more householders aged 80 and up, and older renters will continue to see higher monthly housing payments and stagnant incomes—a dire forecast.

In its 2023 *Housing America's Older Adults* report, JCHS declared that there was an "enormous unmet need" and found 11.2 million older adults are housing-cost burdened. JCHS found that there are now more cost-burdened renters, across all generations, than has ever been measured in modern U.S. history. These housing challenges make financial stresses, medical challenges, loneliness, and mental health issues worse. Meanwhile, an AARP study on senior homelessness found 1 in 5 Americans over 55 lacked a permanent place to live—underscoring the need to close the senior housing gap and create rental options.

Traditional senior housing plays a role in solving this shortfall, but expanding housing options and retrofitting existing housing is needed, too—particularly in the suburbs and exurbs, Molinsky says.

"There's a misconception that the main way to think about housing for older adults is senior living facilities," Harrell says. "We need to have

affordable options throughout the housing stock and in all our communities for people of all ages, including older adults."

Planners that see this silver tsunami can plan for it. AARP research found nine out of 10 Americans over 65 want to stay in their communities as long as possible, so focusing on increasing density, walkability, and car-free transit options in existing communities is important. Harrell underscores the value of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to provide seniors with more housing options or to provide rental income for people who want to stay in their homes. Additionally, planners and cities can incentivize builders to focus on age-friendly features, including more accessible design, as a tradeoff for density bonuses.

One agency that has hit the ground running is the planning department in Loveland, Colorado, the proposed home of Kallimos. Planners have actively encouraged clusters of small cottage-type homes by creating a new lot type in a recent code update. Urban cottage lots are meant to allow developments in spaces smaller than the current 3,500-square-foot standard lot and are tailor-made for these concepts. They've also altered standard wide roads to include wider sidewalks, narrow lanes, and more visible pedestrian crosswalks to make the development more walkable for seniors.

Projects proving housing is health

These are changes that, like so many planning best practices, benefit residents of all demographics. And while Loveland City Planner Kerri Burchett, AICP, says the Colorado community has been focused on tackling the affordability issue—Loveland's median home price is $518,500—she has found that solving problems for seniors can create a domino effect.

By incentivizing and allowing owners to split land into smaller lots, older homeowners can sell parts of their property and age in place. Density bonuses create more opportunities for affordable senior rentals, which can entice older residents to move out of their multiple-bedroom single-family homes, getting those units back into the market for younger families. The urban cottage lot concept will hopefully catalyze new, more affordable projects that achieve townhome density but maintain individual yards.

The need is clear. "We have a 4,000-household waitlist for affordable housing in Loveland, which has a population of 80,000," Burchett says. "And a third of [those are] senior or older adult households."

Accessible older adult housing becomes more effective when projects go beyond housing, Molinsky says. She advocates for solutions that lean toward common spaces, shared meals,

In the Bridge Meadows community in North Portland, Oregon, a 6,200-square-foot meadow and courtyard serves as the community's backyard. The affordable intergenerational community is home to 75 children, parents, and elders.

COURTESY BRIDGE MEADOWS

and service coordinators—a step before assisted living that invests in and realizes the health benefits of community engagement.

This has been a rallying cry for intergenerational developments across the nation, which deliberately pair older and younger populations. Bridge Meadows in Oregon has developed four facilities that house seniors along with foster children and their foster parents. The arrangement gives elders emotional and social support, helping them live with more "meaning and purpose," says Derenda Schubert, the nonprofit's executive director.

Previous Bridge Meadows multifamily developments, where the organization functioned as a codeveloper, ran up against zoning regulations that required additional approvals and conditional use permits, which raised development costs and hampered affordability. Schubert advocates for more zoning flexibility.

Size matters, too. Schubert likes capping these developments below 50 units to create smaller, more deliberate communities. That can be challenging because many incentive programs for affordable housing target and support larger projects. Changing these formulas would allow developers to target smaller plots of land and do more infill projects.

"I would love to see housing agencies put aside some money for these creative ideas that have long-term effects," she says. "We are a long-term investment. Elders stay happy and healthy here. They don't pass away at a hospital or nursing home. They live out their lives here, reducing costs on other systems. Planners think about housing—but housing is health."

Chicago has helped pioneer a series of colocation projects, which pair new or rehabbed public library branches with affordable housing development. Local builder Evergreen Real Estate Group has been involved in a pair of these projects that place senior housing above libraries, cutting costs on both projects and creating de facto senior centers and gathering spaces.

Evergreen Director of Development David Block, AICP, extolled the virtue of allowing different kinds of nonretail tenants on the ground floor of such developments, noting that regulations tend to mandate retail tenants on the ground floor. By making it possible for the Chicago Housing Authority and Chicago Public Library to collaborate, these facilities not only foster community cohesion but also connect residents to existing urban amenities, including transportation networks. The developer is now exploring another such project in Denver.

COURTESY RODNEY HARRELLL

RODNEY HARRELL TALKS ABOUT ADUs AND AGE-FRIENDLY HOUSING OPTIONS

Scan the QR code to watch the video and learn more about what planners can do to support housing choices for everyone.

Location can be crucial

A key advantage of these new forms of senior housing is proximity. Building amid existing neighborhoods and public infrastructure allows for overlapping services and cheaper, quicker access to community, retail, medical services, and support. Matthias Hollwich, founder of HWKN Architecture and author of the book *New Aging*, believes office-to-senior housing conversions offer extensive benefits in dense neighborhoods across New York City and elsewhere. The architect is currently developing a concept called FLX Live, with aims to set up projects in Chicago and Toronto.

Zoning rigidity can hinder these projects. Many cities strictly separate residential and commercial use, especially in office districts. Allowing more mixed-use development makes these types of conversions—which become more and more feasible as office vacancies hit a national record—faster and more affordable. If planners begin with older adults in mind, inserting them into conversations by centering them in building codes, zoning rules, transportation plans, and community engagement, they can encourage an evolution toward age-friendly communities.

Small steps, like altering park planning to include more benches and restrooms, or bigger changes, like zoning reform that encourages dense neighborhoods, can help everyone—not just seniors. Looking at planning through an intergenerational lens, Schubert says, can unlock new solutions for long-standing challenges.

"We've got to break outside of our normal day-to-day, this-is-the-only-way-it-works approach," Kallimos's Marama says. "Small tweaks make significant differences."

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

SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER

Laguna Vista, *Texas*

THIS 10-ACRE ECOTOURISM HUB SERVES as a focal point for visitors to enjoy and learn about the beauty and cultural heritage of the 428-mile Caracara Trail in the coastal Rio Grande Valley. Funded through a half-penny hotel tax, the center was designed to catalyze local economic development. It educates the public about how the site's modified natural river cutoff captures and recycles storm-water and teaches about the valley's four ecosystems through interactive exhibits, signage, on-site educators, sculptures depicting native wildlife, and more than 48,000 native plantings. Popular with hikers and birdwatchers, the center is a starting place for traversing loma hills and lagoons, gazing upon migratory birds and viewing the wildlife of the adjacent Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

A two-story-high boardwalk allows visitors to take in sweeping views and learn more about the wetlands, coastal prairies, and animal species native to South Texas. (Got a climate win-win that makes your Community Green? Tell us about it: email mstromberg@planning.org.)

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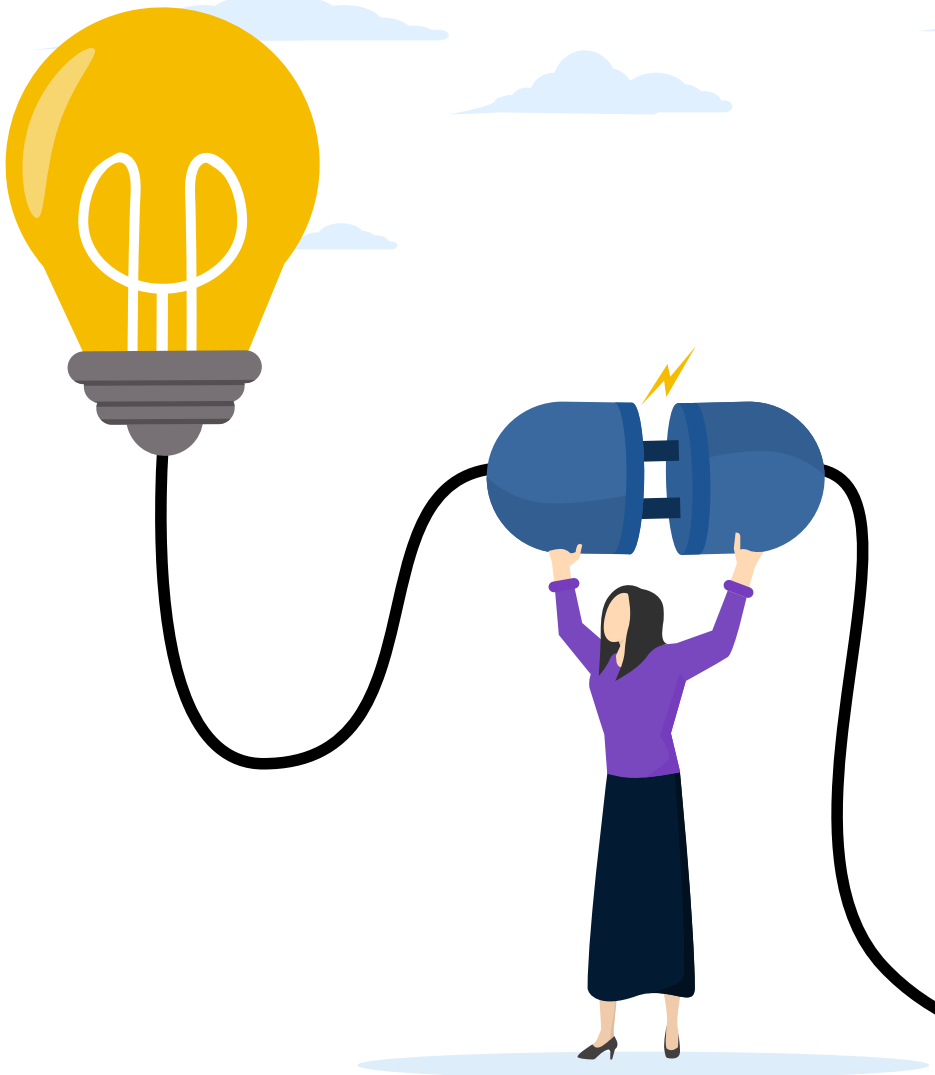

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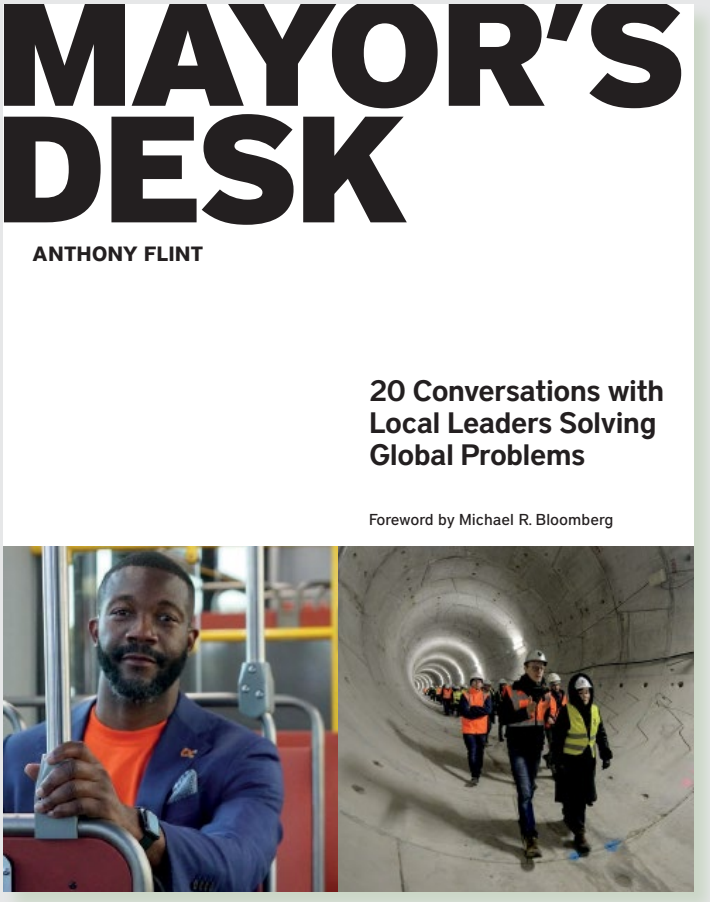

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