THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

FALL 2025

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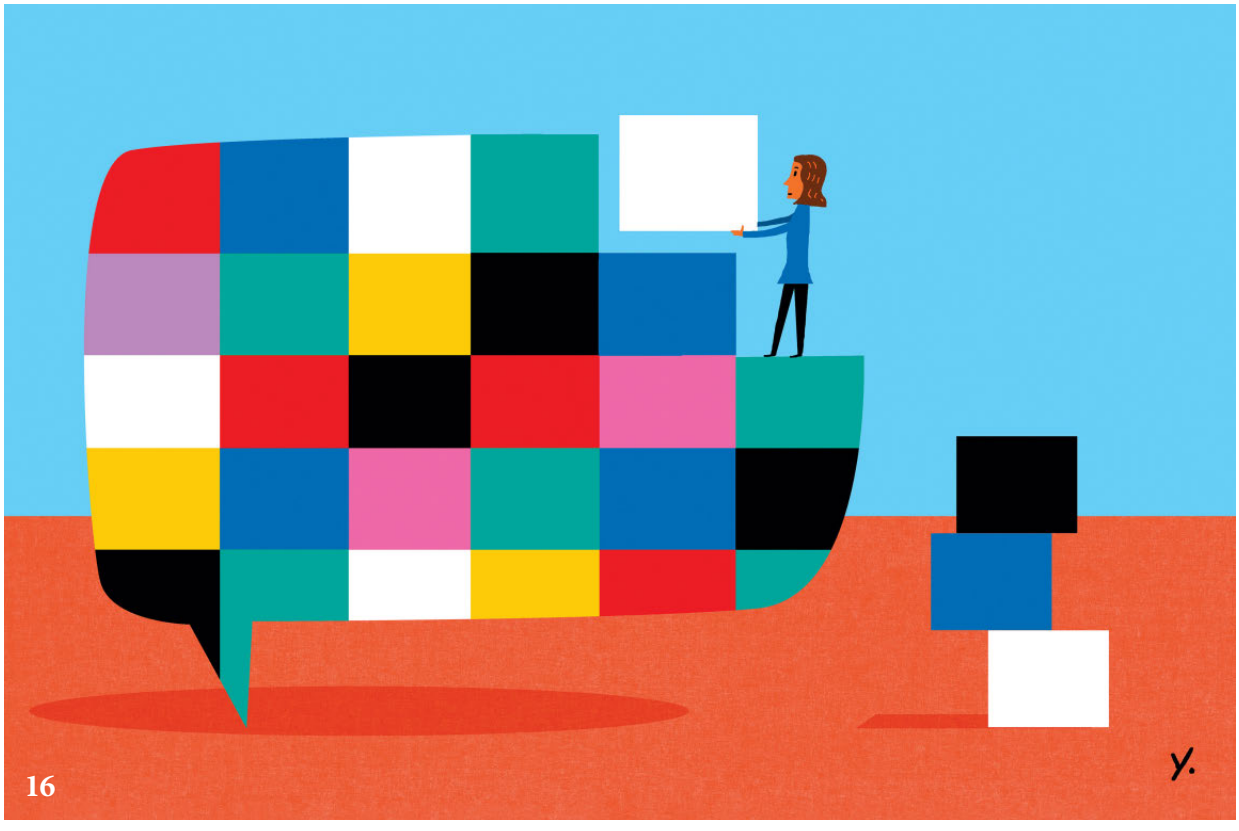

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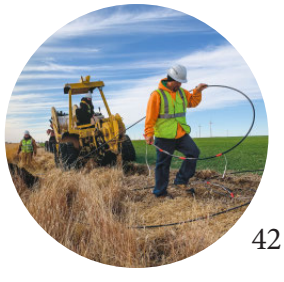

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On the cover: In Boulder, Colorado, Brett KenCairn leads with innovative ideas for a greener future. From top: Mastering your message; rural broadband challenges.

Contributors

Michael Ciaglo
Out on a Limb, cover and page 26

As a Denver-based freelance photographer, Ciaglo often draws on the beauty of Colorado's forests as the backdrop of his stories for national publications and commercial clients. "I'm always grateful when I can work among the trees," he says. "And I'm thankful for the people who make sure we all have access to these green spaces."

Lauren Middleton-Pratt
Talk Planning Without Losing Your Audience, page 16

"Communication is the planner's hidden superpower," says the planning director of Austin, Texas, who also has a communications and public relations background. Especially in today's environment, "don't play politics, but know the game. By mastering messaging and understanding audience dynamics, planners can deliver results that stand the test of time."

Chris Quattro, PhD, AICP
5 Meaningful Ways to Support the Unhoused, page 22

For the North Carolina-based planning professor, consultant, and community service leader, Hurricane Helene brought the experience of homelessness back into sharp focus. Quattro hopes this piece will empower communities to see opportunities to take small steps forward even when issues seem insurmountable.

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 THE EDITOR OF THE *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION*

New Benefit Takes You from Page to Pavement

THIS YEAR MARKS the centennial anniversary of the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (*JAPA*). As its editor, I take profound pride in celebrating this milestone.

Since its founding as *City Planning* in 1925, the journal has evolved alongside the profession, reflecting the broadening scope of planning from early isolated efforts amid rapid urban changes to a comprehensive discipline encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

JAPA has published thousands of articles, serving as both chronicler and catalyst for urban planning's intellectual journey, remaining focused on the future of the planning. It stands as the journal of record for the profession, and although other respected planning-related journals exist, *JAPA* uniquely commits to disseminating research that is directly useful to planning practitioners.

In this historic moment, we underscore the journal's unbreakable ties to planning practice by announcing that *JAPA* is now included in your APA membership. Whether you are a longtime user of the journal or just discovering it, you will find it to be another relevant and accessible tool that adds to the value of your APA membership. All of APA's publications, events, education, and advocacy efforts work together to support you as you, in turn, support your community. Now access to *JAPA* is a part of that extensive body of resources.

ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE BIXLER

'Along with APA's full suite of publications, research materials, and educational events, you now have access to *JAPA*, another valuable tool to help you put your next big planning idea into motion.'

—YAN SONG, *JAPA* EDITOR

Accessible in four key ways

JAPA has set the intellectual agenda through rigorous peer-reviewed research, commentaries, and book reviews that bridge academia and practice. Its impact is evident in standard journal citation metrics, as well as in the ways it moves from page to pavement, influencing everyday planning work and promoting the value of planners. *JAPA* articles delve into the same issues that practitioners work with on the job, from extreme heat mitigation and missing middle housing to e-scooters and the last-mile problem.

JAPA delivers work that directly informs on-the-ground decision-making, from land use strategies to community engagement tools, and it does so quickly. Gone are the days when research lagged practice by a year or more. Guided by its commitment to publish "timely research on topics that matter to practicing planners," and complemented by the speed of digital-first publishing, *JAPA*'s case studies, policy recommendations, and analyses equip practitioners to address pressing real-world challenges in real time.

JAPA also is accessible because its articles are written in plain English. Building on the foundation of previous editors, I strive to make articles readable and jargon-free, requiring each one to include a clear "Takeaway for Practice" that identifies at-a-glance its usefulness to planners. Starting soon, I'll also be establishing a new advisory group composed of practicing planners to ensure this charge is met.

JAPA has been trusted for generations as an influential and essential voice of planning, and it will continue to be that voice for many more years to come. Along with APA's full suite of publications, research materials, and educational events, you now have access to another valuable tool to help you put your next big planning idea into motion.

JAPA *Editor Yan Song is a professor of land use and environmental planning and the director of the Program on Chinese Cities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

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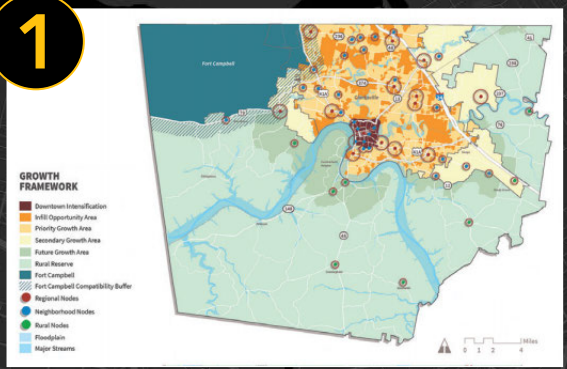

Future-Proof Development

The Clarksville-Montgomery County Regional Planning Commission in Tennessee partnered with the City of Clarksville and Montgomery County to complete a regional comprehensive plan. Using GIS, planners assessed land-use suitability across residential, commercial, and employment uses to create a detailed framework that maps out the region's growth for the future.

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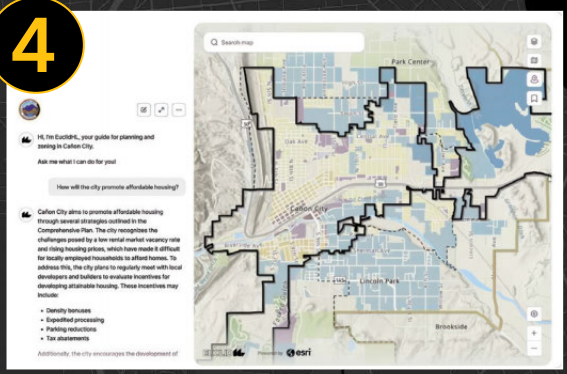

Engage Stakeholders

Cañon City, Colorado, is using GIS along with an AI-powered assistant to make planning data accessible to the public. Users can ask a question like, "Can I build an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) in my backyard?" and receive a simple answer backed by interactive maps, 3D scenes, and diagrams. Cañon City is empowering its community members to engage more effectively in local development.

5 Ways to Build Smarter, Stronger Communities

What do smarter, stronger communities have in common? Planners using geographic information system (GIS) technology to make data-driven decisions. Explore five ways your peers across the country are enhancing workflows, ensuring compliance, and advancing economic mobility.

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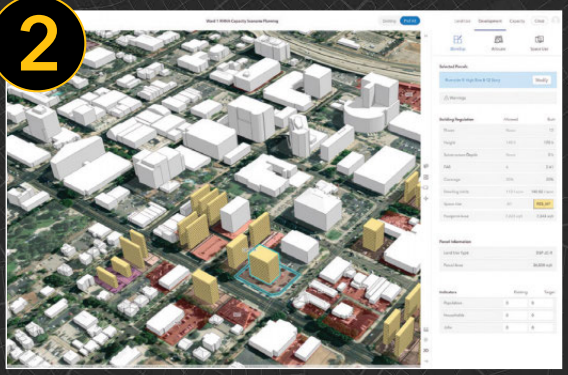
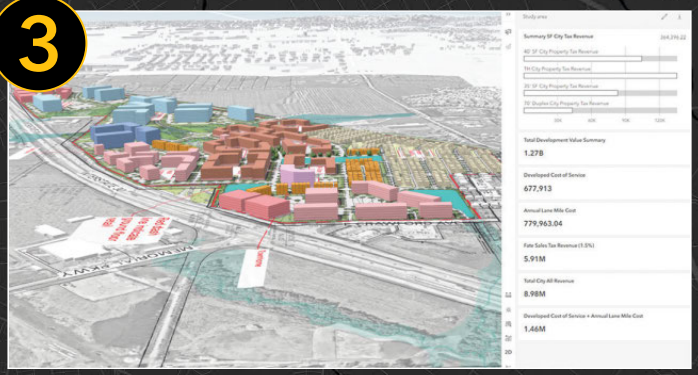


Enhance Planning and Design

The City of Riverside, California, needed to meet a state-mandated goal of accommodating 24,000 new residential units. In order to meet this goal, planners used GIS to model various scenarios in 3D and identified where these new units would go.

3



Achieve Economic Mobility

Planners in Fate, Texas, used GIS to test development scenarios and immediately understand their financial impacts. Each scenario immediately updated metrics like city revenue, cost of service, and development value so that the city could approve developments that matched its financial goals.

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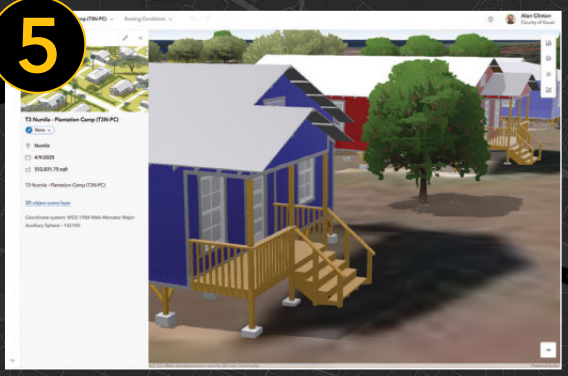

Maintain Compliance

Kauai County, Hawaii, maintains character and keeps its community safe by using GIS to develop codes and building ordinances. With wildfire threats increasing in the region, planners modeled scenarios in 3D that informed which codes for construction, home hardening, community vegetation management, and access requirements would lead to the most resilient structures.

To discover how GIS will strengthen your community, visit **go.esri.com/planning2025**.

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Every Friday, the Gordon Elementary School bike bus, which started in 2023, hits the streets in the Kitsilano neighborhood of Vancouver.
COURTESY INSUN YUN

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TRANSPORTATION

It's Bike-to-School Time for Sustainable Transportation

Grassroots efforts around the globe lead kids to school safely on two wheels. Now, North American planners are joining in. By Elissa Chudwin

JESSICA TILLYER puts on a sequined safety vest, hops on her bike, and rides to the start of her bike-bus route in Montclair, New Jersey, every Friday.

At 8:18 a.m. the music blasts, and she and other volunteers lead the way to Nishuane Elementary School. "You really have to start with the vibes," Tillyer says. "It has to just feel like it is the best Friday morning party that you, as a millennial parent, are about to take your children on."

Tillyer, cofounder of the nonprofit Bike Bus World, helped launch the Montclair Bike Bus during the 2022-2023 school year. Now, it's one of the largest in the U.S., with multiple routes to 10 schools. "It's incredible that my route will sometimes have 50 or 60 people of all ages, of all backgrounds," she says.

Popularized in Barcelona, Spain, bike buses include set routes and schedules for students to cycle to school, usually once a week. More than 470 bike buses exist across at least 17 countries, with routes along neighborhood streets with little vehicle traffic. Bike buses increase physical activity and socialization, says Jordi Honey-Rosés, PHD, a professor at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. They also contribute to the shift toward more sustainable transit options.

"Kids get to think about their town or city in a very different way," says Honey-Rosés, founder of City Lab Discovery. "They're literally at the center of the streets. I think that's a very powerful part of bike bus—that they're the protagonists."

While most bike buses are formed by parents at the grassroots level, a planner-led effort has started rolling in York County, Pennsylvania.

Navigating new routes

Ehsan Ershad Sarabi, a senior transportation planner for the York County Planning Commission (YCPC), is coordinating his own initiative after hearing Honey-Rosés's presentation about bike buses at APA's National Planning Conference in March 2025.

He believes that bike buses will not only teach kids about traffic safety but also encourage other community members to walk or

cycle more. "This is important to me, personally, because I think it's going to have an effect on the future," Sarabi says.

He considers the bike bus a part of the county's bicycle and pedestrian plan, which includes expanding local trails and improving safety measures.

But starting any new project can be complicated in York County, which encompasses 72 suburban, historic, and rural municipalities within 911 square miles. "When we talk about complete streets or bicycle-pedestrian planning, we have to be very cognizant of the context that we're working in," says Mike Pritchard, AICP, assistant director of YCPC. "We have to tailor the improvements that we're proposing to different areas."

Meanwhile, launching a bike bus as a planner instead of as a volunteer has its own set of challenges, Honey-Rosés says. "You need local ownership of the initiative," he says. "It's not as easy as a planner. I think one of the key steps is to find a core coordinating group and then listen to them in terms of what's needed for support."

Sarabi says he hopes to start a bike bus in the city of York, the county's largest municipality, where a complete streets ordinance also is in the works. "York is a great candidate because of its larger school system, existing bike infrastructure, and simply more available options and routes to work with," he says. Sarabi reached out to local school districts and other organizations for their feedback, and they're meeting this fall to start planning.

Jessica Tillyer and her daughter, Ren, saddle up for the bike bus in Montclair, New Jersey.

One potential roadblock is finding a route that isn't in a high-traffic area. Maya Goldstein, bike bus manager for HUB Cycling in Vancouver, Canada, is familiar with this challenge after helping launch several bike buses. "For my kids' school, it was very straightforward," Goldstein says, "but now looking at other schools, there are more complications around it." In Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver, the route begins on a busy road before moving to quieter suburban streets.

To prioritize safety, the Montclair Bike Bus has a handful of parent or community volunteers blocking traffic to ensure no one is left behind. Weather and elevation are also considerations, as the township is on the cliffs of the Watchung Mountains.

Despite the difficulties, Sarabi and Pritchard say they're optimistic about bike buses in York County, especially since bike-to-school days were popular in the past. They plan to start slow, with a monthly bike bus, to troubleshoot any issues.

"It really is just getting everybody on the same page and just pushing the ball forward," Pritchard says.

BIKE BUS AROUND THE GLOBE

21.3 minutes is the average travel time per trip

80% operate once a week

73% of children ride with caregivers

7.9 years is the average age of students

SOURCE: *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION*, 2024

A 'big win' for safety

Interest in Vancouver's bike bus grew quickly, Goldstein says, but people struggled to start one at their own school. So, what began as a volunteer effort for Goldstein has turned into a part-time job when she became bike-bus manager for the nonprofit HUB Cycling in October 2024. "I really thought we would need something bigger—something more organized and maybe more resources," she says.

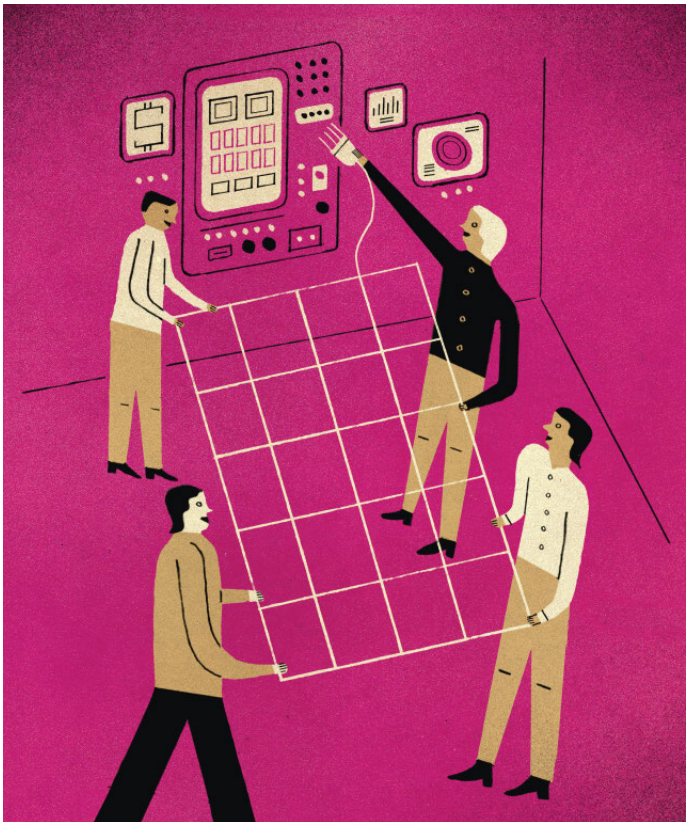
This past spring, Goldstein says five bike buses—including one in Saanich near Victoria and three in Vancouver—took off. Funding for the program came from the Province of British Columbia (BC), as well as the Society for Children and Youth of BC's Walking School Bus Initiative.

The rise of bike buses has felt like a big win for the community. "Sometimes we don't realize how challenging it can be for some kids to start their day," Goldstein says. "So, if they have a positive experience before school, then their day at school is so much better."

Meanwhile, in Montclair, Tillyer says her bike bus also has brought more attention to safety and accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians. "It has really extended beyond creating these routes and getting kids to school into trying to change the infrastructure within our town," she says.

Elissa Chudwin is APA's content associate.

COURTESY JESSICA TILLYER



DAVID PLUNKERT

TECH

Can AI Empower Planners to Do More with Less?

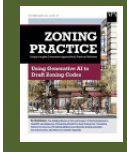
As federal policy and funding cuts add new complications, some are turning to artificial intelligence to improve efficiency. By Joe Tedino

WITH FEDERAL housing and urban development programs facing potential funding cuts, planners are looking for ways to do more with less. One solution is using artificial intelligence (AI) to help prioritize projects based on need and available resources and to automate time-consuming manual tasks.

Generative AI—including Google Gemini and OpenAI's ChatGPT—quickly analyzes vast amounts of data to create text, images, and other content. For planners, AI can serve as a powerful tool to streamline workflows, enhance creativity, and uncover insights that drive decision-making.

Big cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle already use AI for a variety of planning projects, such as analyzing population data to predict housing needs, managing traffic, and improving energy efficiency. Now, planners are looking into how implementing generative AI can assist with reviewing permit applications, conducting site surveys, or supporting other processes.

John Cruz, AICP, a senior housing and land use planner for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in Greater Boston, has examined how AI also can be applied to routine planning tasks. One example is using a tool like Fireflies.ai to record and transcribe meeting notes so extra staff members don't have to attend. "If there are going to be cuts made to budgets," Cruz says, "we are going to have to be much more sensitive with our time beyond what we already do today."



LEARN MORE

"Using Generative AI to Draft Zoning Codes" explores whether you can "vibe code" a zoning ordinance. Subscribers can access—and nonsubscribers can purchase—this issue of *Zoning Practice* using the QR code below or by visiting planning.org/zoning practice.

Smaller cities embrace AI

Sandy Springs, a city of more than 100,000 residents in Metro Atlanta, has a new AI initiative in the works. Earlier this year, the city brought on Keith McMellen, an expert in business intelligence and cloud computing, as its director of data strategy, analytics, and AI integration. He was hired to help the city modernize core planning functions, such as permitting, zoning, and development reviews.

Earlier this year, Sandy Springs was among the cities that saw the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) briefly rescind its federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), although the pullback was short-lived. Over the past three years, the city has spent about $1.6 million in CDBG funds for sidewalk improvements and other infrastructure projects aimed at improving pedestrian

safety and accessibility, especially in under-resourced areas.

The long-term availability of these funds is uncertain under the Trump administration, whose fiscal year 2026 budget proposes to eliminate about half of HUD spending, including CDBG. To lessen the impact of these potential cuts, Sandy Springs officials plan to use AI for data analysis. "I view it as an opportunity for the city to gain the most value from what federal funding is still available or from other sources," McMellen says.

By using AI to learn from concerns raised in public comments, online feedback, and city council meetings, McMellen believes themes will emerge that will help the city make the process more inclusive and scalable through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Another benefit of Sandy Springs's digital initiative is how it can support creating key performance indicators (KPIs) during project construction and implementation to monitor budgets and schedules. Once a project is finished, the KPIs can "determine if the project met its goals and communicate transparently through a dashboard or the city's website," McMellen says.

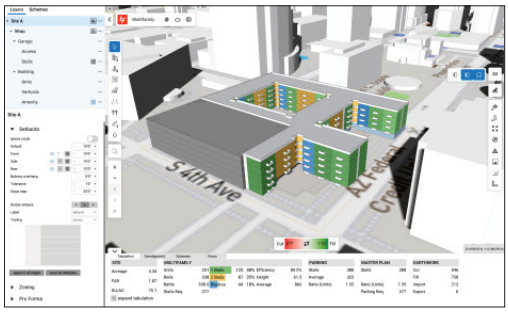
As part of a pilot project, the city's planning staff is examining the use of ChatGPT and other AI tools in their daily work. Michele McIntosh-Ross, the city's planning and zoning manager, says findings will soon be shared with the entire team to determine how to implement AI throughout the department. While consultants typically use AI to develop small area plans and design guidelines, she says, the city will use the technology to update its comprehensive plan.

To lessen the impact of potential funding cuts, Sandy Springs officials plan to use AI for data analysis.

Time and cost savings

Sandy Springs also is leveraging AI-derived data for its biannual tree canopy analysis. The method offers cost savings because "we avoid time-consuming traditional pixel classification methods," says Bridget Lawlor, the city's geographic information system manager.

Esri's High Resolution Canopy Height Estimation tool, for example, is a deep learning model that uses high-resolution satellite imagery to obtain accurate measurements of the tree canopy height over vast areas.



Delaware, Ohio, planners use TestFit's Site Solver tool to customize mixed-use building layouts.

Delaware, Ohio, a city of around 45,000 just north of Columbus, is also exploring using AI for planning work. Economic Development Director Nic Langford has experimented with a new generative AI design tool from TestFit that can optimize building layouts.

He says he had the tool run through 100 different iterations for a mixed-use development proposal. By downloading the options, he could easily adjust for setbacks, building height limits, and unit count density. He says the tool does have limitations—the overhead view won't capture surface or subsurface land characteristics—but those are outweighed by the speed and convenience saved by not drawing up building layouts manually.

AI can't be ignored

Even though the use of AI may seem limitless, there are drawbacks. Nevertheless, it's not something "that we can get away from, not just as planners, but in many areas of life," Cruz says. "We have a committee of folks who have been looking at applications we could potentially use, and there is a lot of skepticism right now on adopting these tools. Part of that is driven by the unknown about something that is so new and becoming so prevalent all over the place."

The ethics of AI use are a major consideration for planners, too, as researchers Thomas Sanchez, AICP; Marc Brenman; and Xinyue Ye point out in a recent article in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. "The allure of AI's data processing capabilities, although tempting, should not overshadow the intrinsic human touch, characterized by context and empathy, which has been central to effective urban planning," the authors wrote. They concluded by reminding readers that "it is the planner's role to use all available facts and proceed in a way that best serves the public."

Joe Tedino is a Chicago-based writer and activist focusing on climate, sustainability, and technology.

COURTESY TESTFIT

PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLANS

Sacramento Sets the Pace for Zoning Reform

FINDING AND PAYING for housing these days is difficult. A recent study by the Pew Research Center says the U.S. has a shortage of between 4 million and 7 million homes. Sacramento, California, is no exception. There, nearly three in four renters are rent-burdened, and transplants from the Bay Area are driving up costs even more.

The good news is that crises often inspire and catalyze change. Sacramento Director of Community Development Tom Pace and his fellow planners are shifting the way the city approaches housing supply. On an episode of the *People Behind the Plans* podcast, Pace joined APA Editor in Chief Meghan Stromberg to talk about the city's efforts to streamline permitting processes, relax restrictions about parking, and create more attainable housing.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

COURTESY TOM PACE

HEAR THE FULL STORY

Scan the QR code below or go to planning.org/podcast to listen to the full conversation on *People Behind the Plans*.

Q&A

STROMBERG: Sacramento has made significant changes to accelerate the supply of housing, focusing particularly on infill housing. How did zoning reform actions get started?

PACE: During the recession in 2009, we realized we needed to promote economic development and housing development. At that moment, we were just thinking broadly that any and all development would be good. This, coupled with the planned implementation of our new general plan, led us to imagine some radical changes to our zoning.

Around 2011, La Valentina Apartments was a proposed smart-growth, affordable apartment project right next to a light rail station. In other words, it was exactly the kind of project that we said we wanted to encourage for urban infill, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development reasons—but this project needed about 19 special permits, variances, exceptions, and other approvals under our antiquated zoning and development regulations just to get to the building permit stage.

We started with parking reform.

STROMBERG: Can you tell us a little bit about what that process looked like?

PACE: We were forcing projects to either request a waiver of the parking requirement or build incredibly expensive parking garages or parking lots, which was not something we wanted downtown. We began to realize we were not helping ourselves, so we cut back dramatically on the amount of parking required initially.

Then, we used a contextual approach. We realized that the needs in the suburban parts of our city that were more conventionally sprawling were different from the needs of downtown. We also had older inner-ring neighborhoods between downtown and those suburban areas, so we had different requirements that gradually increased parking as you got farther away from the core and transit facilities.

Since then, we've eliminated parking requirements entirely.

STROMBERG: You made other changes to the city's zoning code to ease the way for more housing. What were some of those?

PACE: In Sacramento, we set out to be a pro-housing, pro-infill, pro-transit community, so transit-oriented infill housing projects are our number-one priority. For these projects, we eliminated parking requirements and maximum density limits. We increased

height limits and allowable floor area. We reduced setbacks and open space requirements. We removed conditional-use permit requirements for housing development, and we updated design guidelines to reflect the kinds of projects that our local development industry was trying to deliver.

We've also changed the way that we review development projects. In the past, most of those required public hearings before our planning commission, and many projects required city council approval. It was a very onerous process, and I think it subconsciously sent a message to the community that they needed to show up and oppose it, so we've tried to turn that on its head.

The infill, affordable La Valentina Apartments sit adjacent to a light rail station. Today, the project might sail through the approvals process, but when proposed in 2011, it needed nearly 20 variances, exceptions, and other special approvals.

We said, "Let's do good planning and set our regulations up to encourage the type of development that we identified in the plan. We should be able to delegate approval down to the staff level for most projects or to a director-level hearing process for minor adjustments that are needed."

That's what we've done, and now very rarely do development projects go to the city council or the planning commission for development approvals—those are almost always approved at the staff level.

STROMBERG: That's a big change. Did implementation pose any challenges?

PACE: The real challenge was getting buy-in for the idea that staff could approve different scales of development. We started out relatively small and gradually expanded the authority of staff over time as we saw success. We had more and more projects going through in a noncontroversial way, and people accepted this new process pretty readily.

STROMBERG: What have some of the outcomes been since making the changes?

PACE: During the recession, we had an extremely low level of housing development, down to 265 to 400 units a year. The last four or five years, we've been in the 3,000- to 3,700-units-a-year range. I think we're in the top handful of cities in the state in terms of overall housing number of units per year.

Also, I think we were the leader recently in deed-restricted affordable housing units. That's one trend that we've seen in the past five or six years. I would attribute that to the approvals streamlining that we have done because affordable housing had to run the gauntlet before: You advertise a proposed affordable housing project to the public and then take it to a planning commission meeting with a public hearing.

I think that sets up a dynamic that can be very negative and make it difficult for projects like that to get approved. It adds more time and uncertainty, and the potential—and temptation—to tinker with the project at a public hearing podium can result in making the project less feasible.

STROMBERG: Considering Sacramento's planning approach, what advice would you give to other places?

PACE: Focus on updating outdated regulations and regulations that aren't achieving local objectives. Try to help the local leadership understand how the rules that are in place may not be meeting their goals and what could be done to streamline, right-size, or update them to help achieve those goals.

In Sacramento, we wanted to see our downtown and our commercial corridors be revitalized, and we realized that parking regulations, height limits, and density restrictions were not getting us there. Neither was our cumbersome development review process. When we explained that to the community and to our decision-makers, they were willing to adjust to achieve the goals that we agreed we all wanted to achieve.

Meghan Stromberg is APA's editor in chief.

BRUCE DAMONTE

EXPLORE

ONLINE AND AROUND THE U.S.

REDLINED: Cities, Suburbs, and Segregation

Johnson County Museum, Overland Park, Kansas

This exhibit takes viewers through the history of redlining and desegregation efforts in Johnson County, Kansas. The stories can be looked at through both a local and national lens to understand the long-lasting effects of redlining in the U.S. and the efforts to fight against it in the past and present. *Virtual.*

PAST AND FUTURE CITIES

National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.

Coming next year is an exhibit that illustrates the relationship between society and the built environment, from historic architecture to modern urban planning. Artifacts, photographs, and interactive displays show how cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors have shaped U.S. cities. *Oct. 1, 2026–June 18, 2027.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, LEFT: COURTESY KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY; CATHERINE BIXLER (2); U.S. DEPT. OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT/FLICKR

EXHIBITS

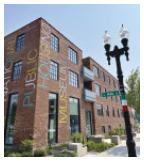
Public Housing's Complicated History

Interactive storytelling, everyday objects, and case studies showcase the lives of real people over the past century. By Elissa Chudwin

WHEN THE NATIONAL Public Housing Museum in Chicago opened its doors in April, its goal was for visitors to better understand the policies that have shaped public housing over time.

Even more than that, though, its staff wants public housing to feel personal, regardless of where someone grew up.

Located in the only remaining building of the Jane Addams Homes, one of Chicago's first public housing developments, the museum shares its history through the lens of the people who have lived in public housing all over the U.S. "One of the touchstones for the museum is the idea that 'never again will a single story be told as if it is the only story,'" says Executive Director Lisa Yun Lee. "Public housing has provided safe, affordable shelter and created vibrant communities, and it has also been a site of disinvestment, neglect, and racialized harm. We designed the museum to be a space where grief and joy coexist."



The museum is located in the only remaining building of the Jane Addams Homes, built in 1938 in Chicago. More information is available at nphm.org.

One exhibit features replicas of couch cushions, paired with family photos and stories, that belonged to New York City Housing Authority residents. A nearby display includes beloved items—from a yellow telephone to a wedding dress—from public housing residents across the country, including U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

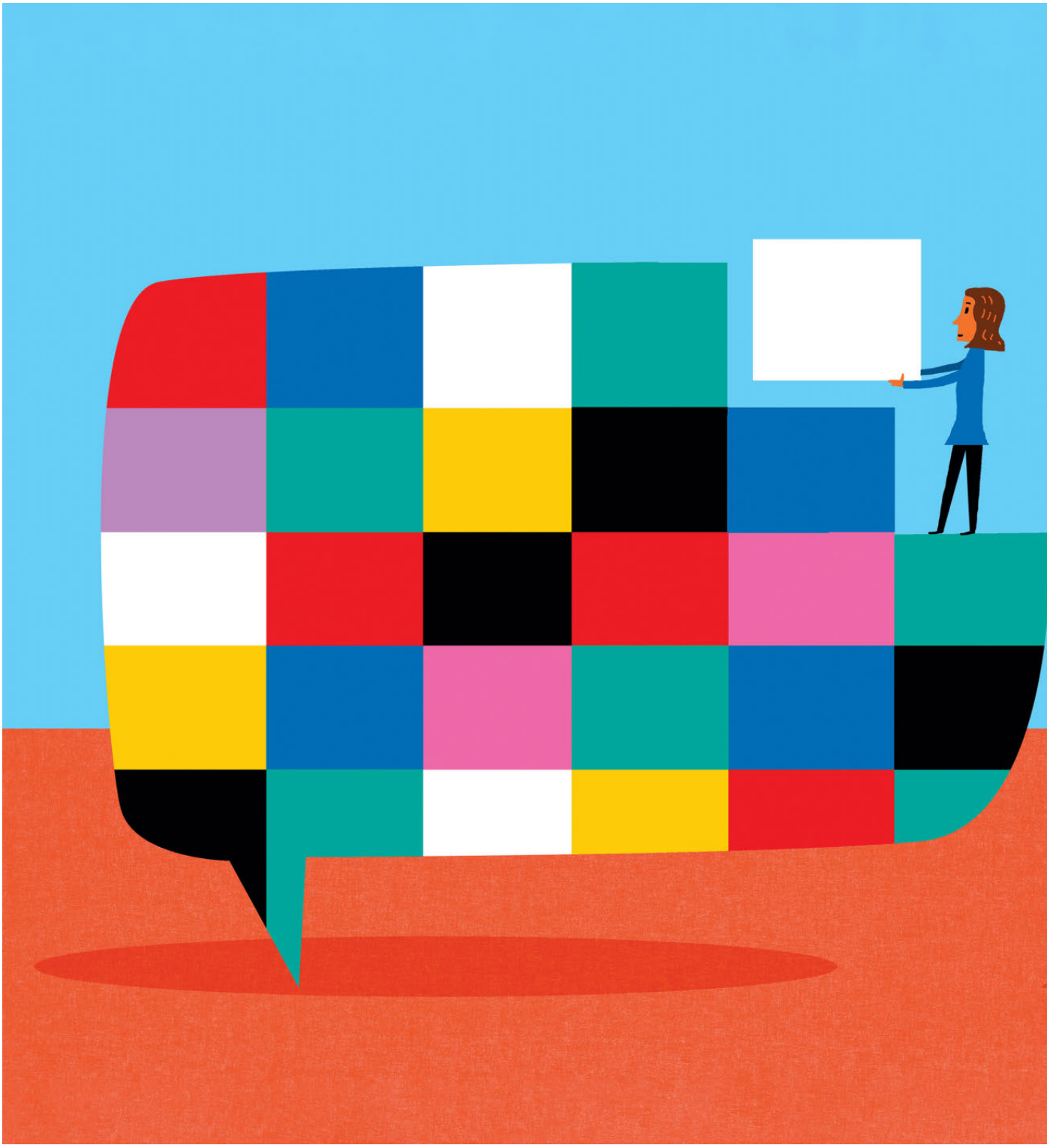
Another exhibit focuses on the complexity of funding public housing. The Millers River installation, based on an article in *Places Journal*, shows why the housing authority in Cambridge, Massachusetts, declared the property obsolete to ultimately preserve the development as privately owned affordable housing.

Guided tours take visitors through recreated apartments of families who lived in Jane Addams Homes in different eras.The first portrays the four-person Turovitz family's home during the late 1930s, including kosher kitchen supplies and a do-it-yourself darkroom, while the last residence resembles the 10-member Hatch family home in the '60s, with a retro TV and framed graduation photos.

"Ultimately, this museum is not just about buildings," Lee says. "It's about belonging."

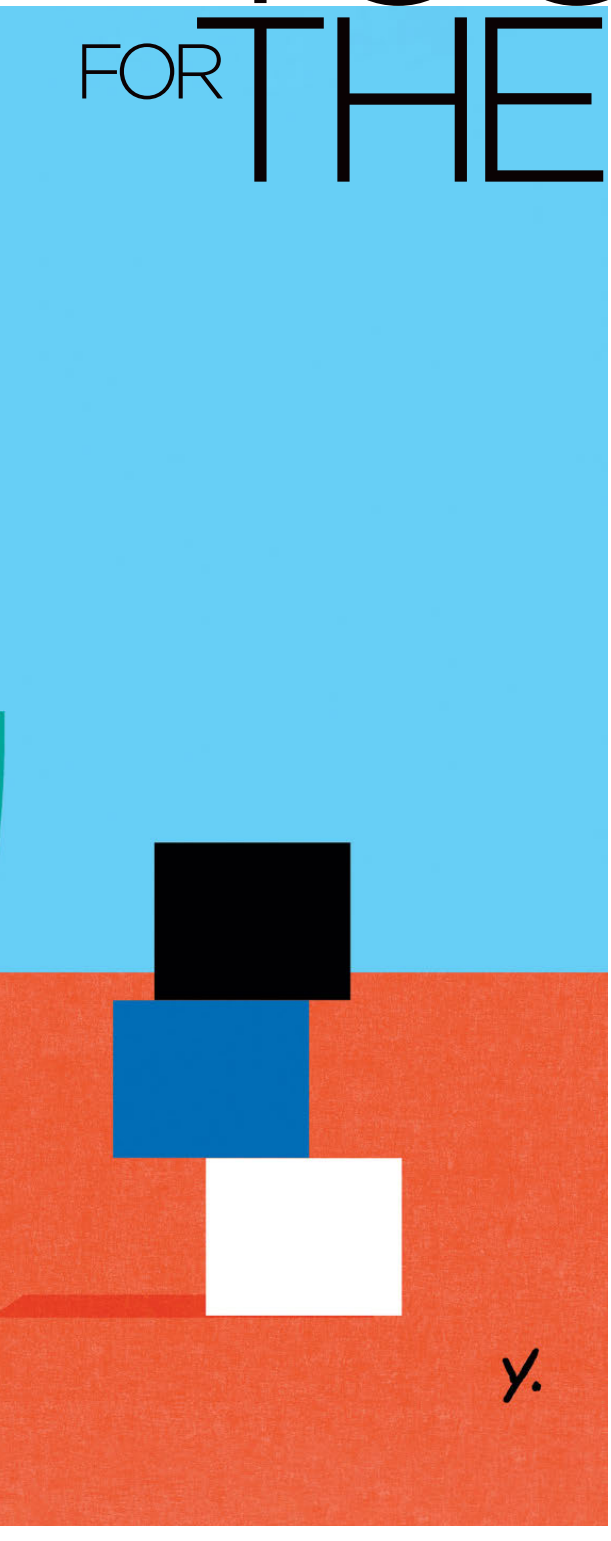
Elissa Chudwin is APA's content associate.

Focusing on community values and using plain language can help you craft a message that resonates.
ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES YANG



TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

KNOWLEDGE YOU CAN PUT TO WORK
The Profession | Housing | Tech Tools | Viewpoint | Planners Library



THE PROFESSION

TALK PLANNING WITHOUT LOSING YOUR AUDIENCE

Six communication-savvy tips to master the message and effectively tell the planning story. *By Lauren Middleton-Pratt*

AS PLANNERS, WE'RE trained to manage competing interests, perplexing zoning codes, and (often outdated) 300-plus-page comprehensive plans. The expectation is that we are calm, impartial problem-solvers who make sense of the chaos with maps, data, and meticulous analysis.

However, while we've mastered the art of technical solutions, many planners don't know how to *talk* about them. Phrases like "form-based code" and "floor area ratio" aren't usually dropped into everyday conversations—and for good reason. If you've ever watched someone's eyes glaze over at a community meeting, you get it.

Yet today, in a world where every decision is publicly debated in the name of transparency, planners can no longer afford to live in the land of acronyms and policy jargon. Our work, once seen as neutral and a bit nerdy, is now the focus of mainstream media.

As a planning director and former assistant city manager with a background in communications and public relations, I've learned that how planners communicate is just as important as what we're communicating. One motto I live by is "Don't play politics, but know the game." (I could write an entire article on that alone.) Translation: We don't have to whip up votes or pick sides. But we do need to understand the players, anticipate reactions, and frame our message so it can't be easily twisted, misunderstood, or lost in translation.

As you prepare to launch your next planning initiative or city council briefing, here are six battle-tested, communication-savvy strategies to help you master your message.

1 **FRAME THE NARRATIVE EARLY AND OFTEN.** If you don't tell your story, someone else will—and chances are, they won't get it right. Whether it's a comprehensive plan update or a controversial code amendment, planners need to lead with clear messaging that's been aligned and approved by leadership. Then repeat it early, often, and consistently until it sticks.

Framing the narrative means leading with the "why," grounding it in community values, and

explaining the "how" in plain language. Don't wait until a public hearing to drop a 50-page staff report. Start with bite-sized messaging across multiple platforms like social media, community newsletters, and city-sponsored events. Consistency and visibility are key!

2 **CLEAR COMMUNICATION IS KING.** Planning jargon might be precise, but it can also be mind-numbing. If your audience needs a glossary to understand your message, you've already lost them. Pro tip: Loop in your communications and marketing pros early. Communication professionals are the secret sauce for turning dense policy messaging into plain language your mom, neighbor, and council member alike can understand.

> There's no time like the present to invest in media, public speaking, and presentation training for planners at every level.

If the public doesn't understand what you're doing or why you're doing it, it doesn't matter how masterful your plan is. Clarity builds trust. Confusion builds suspicion.

3 **MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE.** Public hearings and open houses will always have their place in the world of planning. However, over half of U.S. adults are getting their news and shaping their opinions on social media.

That means it's time for planners to get comfortable with their inner influencer. No, you don't need to go viral with a TikTok dance (unless you really want to). But a simple "Zoning 101" explainer series or a mock urban design site plan review can go a long way when making planning principles more digestible.

The goal isn't entertainment—it's education. Use every channel at your disposal to make planning more approachable. And don't be afraid to get creative!

4 **MIC DROP.** Planning staff are often asked to walk into tense meetings, give presentations, or speak to the media with little to no training on how to do it well.

There's no time like the present to invest in media, public speaking, and presentation training for planners at every level. Maybe your city has a communications pro you can tap—if not, there's always Toastmasters. Help your team learn how to stay cool under pressure, respond to tough questions, and gracefully steer the conversation back to the facts. Think of it like getting your oil changed; routine maintenance keeps everything running smoothly.

Truth be told, I still get thrown off in unfamiliar speaking settings now and then. But after a good coaching session, I'm reminded that a deep breath and solid prep are usually all it takes to survive a curveball question or an impromptu mic moment.

Also, let junior staff present to elected officials and community groups. It's good practice, builds confidence, and prepares the next generation of leaders. They'll thank you later.

5 **REFRAME THE MESSAGE, NOT THE MISSION.** When foundational urban planning values like equity or climate change become politically sensitive (or outright restricted), strategic communication is essential. This isn't a compromise of principles; it's a reframing to ensure initiatives are heard and acted upon. Instead of "climate adaptation," try "community resilience" or "disaster preparedness." When "equity" or "inclusivity" raises a red flag, language like "complete communities" or "comprehensive growth" can convey the same intent with broader appeal. These strategies don't dilute our mission; they ensure it reaches the rooms where decisions are made. Language, just like policy, evolves. So should we.

6 **BE A PLANNING CHEERLEADER.** Yes, I said cheerleader! Planners do incredible work that has real impact, but we're not always so good at sharing our success stories and celebrating community wins. Good planning makes a difference, and we need to make sure the community members and decision-makers we serve know it.

Planners shape how cities grow, how people live, and how communities connect—that's powerful. But with power comes the responsibility of integrity and thoughtfulness. Share your work. Celebrate your wins. Educate your audience. But always anchor your message in people-centric policy, transparency, and long-term community benefit.

Planners don't get to hide in the background anymore. The work we do is too visible, too impactful, and at times can be too controversial. In today's climate, effective communication is critical. We need to understand the political landscape, anticipate reactions, and tailor our message so it's clear, compelling, and hard to twist.

At the end of the day, we're not just planning projects—we're planning for people, for communities, and for the future. That means doing the work and telling the story with courage, consistency, and the kind of clarity that transforms confusion into collaboration. Let's not just plan the future—let's speak for it, too.

Lauren Middleton-Pratt is the director of planning for Austin, Texas.

HOUSING

THE PERFECT (PARKING) SPOT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Partnering with a community land trust, Toronto finds space in one of the most expensive places in North America. *By Michael Koy*

FOR ONE CANADIAN CITY, home is where the parking is, or, more accurately, was.

Toronto has been listed as one of the least affordable cities in North America, with housing costs growing four times more than income in recent years. To combat its housing crisis, the city council started working with local community land trusts—nonprofit organizations that buy and maintain land to ensure the affordability of historic and older neighborhoods—to find possible solutions.

Toronto's plan will redevelop a parking lot into about 78 affordable housing units with a expansive courtyard (top).

One recent initiative approved a project to turn a municipal-owned parking lot into affordable housing that will welcome residents this fall.

From drive-in to move-in ready

The idea to turn a parking lot in the heart of the historic Kensington Market neighborhood at 35 Bellevue Avenue began back in 2017 after the Kensinga ton Market Community Land Trust (KMCLT) filed a petition. Progress takes time, though, and as promises to develop the site fell through over the years, the site remained a place for vehicles, not people.

It wasn't until Mayor Olivia Chow took office in July 2023 that funding became available and the project revved up. This followed her announcement about building 65,000 new rent-controlled homes in response to the city's growing housing crisis.

The 35 Bellevue Avenue plan calls for a four-story apartment building with about 78 units. It will be built using mass timber that has a lower carbon footprint than other construction materials and aims to meet the city's TransformTO Net Zero Strategy sustainability goals, which seek to reduce Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.

Between 1984 and 2018, only 8.5 percent of units categorized as affordable housing were below 80 percent of average market rent, according to analysis from 2022. This project plans to cap rents to 30 percent of residents' incomes.

"In the community land trust model, we're solely committed to long-term affordable housing, so rents will be capped at a certain amount indefinitely," says Kevin Barrett, a KMCLT board member. "Many times, affordable housing built within the private housing scheme is only affordable in the short term, before the costs spike

RENDERINGS: MONTGOMERY SISAM ARCHITECTS INC.

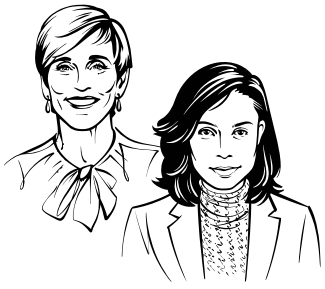
and the landlords raise the rent."

The city chose KMCLT and the St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society to manage the property once construction is completed. Barrett says the project will provide mental health services and aid to its new residents, including frequent check-ins and access to support free of charge. "Some people had been at risk of homelessness, or actually homeless, for years," he says. Currently, estimates say about 13,000 people experiencing homelessness are living in the city's shelters. "So, it's a big shift back to normal life that requires support and mental health services."

Aside from providing relief to people experiencing homelessness, the plan for the apartment building is to integrate it seamlessly into the larger Kensington Market neighborhood. "The proposal respects and reinforces the physical character of Bellevue Avenue, which is generally comprised of low-rise buildings with a varied front yard setback," says Mercedeh Madani, the city's director of housing policy and strategy. This design tracks with the neighborhood's reputation as a vibrant area, made up of many cultures, including Jewish, Chinese, and Filipino communities.

With cities across the world experiencing a lack of attainable housing, governments working with land trusts can provide a community-driven effort to spur housing while protecting neighborhoods from private developers and gentrification. "Affordable housing is best delivered when different levels of government work with nonprofit and community housing partners toward a common goal: housing for all," Madani says.

Michael Koy is an aspiring journalist and writer based in Toronto. He focuses on current stories regarding urban design and planning.

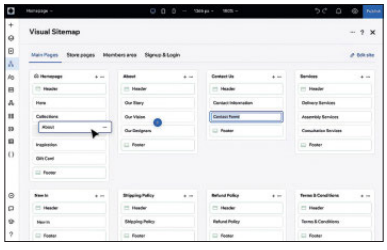


TECH

BUILDING DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

APA's Technology Division highlights platforms that can preserve and convey crucial information. *By Cynthia Albright, FAICP, CUD, GISP, and Lian Plass, AICP*

ANALYZING AND COMMUNICATING data is a key part of planners' jobs, but the data itself needs to be reliable. Among the challenges are quality control, usability, the proliferation of artificial intelligence-generated content, and—more recently—information being removed. As organizations race to back up data and direct practitioners to planning-specific resources, it is necessary to support access to caches of previously available information and bolster planners' capacities to maintain relevant, useful, and adaptable data sources and applications.

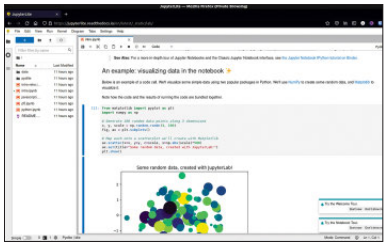


WIX

WEBSITE BUILDER | VISUALIZATION | PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Wix is a web-based site builder that enables planners to communicate findings, host dashboards, or share project updates with the public. Users can choose from templates or build custom pages using a drag-and-drop editor. While not built specifically for data visualization, Wix supports integration with charts, iframes, and web APIs. Consider checking your organization's policies on public hosting and data sharing before uploading sensitive information. The APA Tech Division also highlighted Google Sites as an alternative to Wix in a 2025 webinar.

COST: ● Free, with ads (ad-free browsing and other features available with paid tiers)
RESOURCE FORMATS: Web/HTML
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No



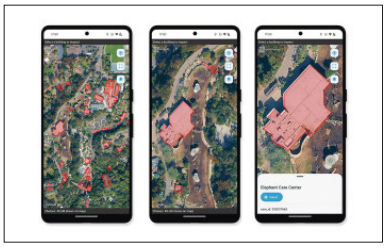
JUPYTER NOTEBOOKS

INTERACTIVE CODING ENVIRONMENT | ANALYSIS | DOCUMENTATION

Jupyter Labs offers a web-based interface for combining code, narrative text, and outputs in one document. Widely used in research and data science, Jupyter Notebooks allows planners to document workflows, test data transformations, and share repeatable analytical processes. When paired with platforms like KNIME or open-source datasets, it can allow for live insights into data scenario testing and reporting. Users can run this utility through the desktop application or through their browser using JupyterLite. Similar utilities that do not require a download include Google CoLab and GitHub Codespaces.

COST: ● Free
RESOURCE FORMATS: Markdown, HTML, Python
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● Yes

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATHRYN RATHKE; COURTESY WIX; JUPYTER



ODK

MOBILE FIELD DATA COLLECTION | APPLICATION | DATA PLATFORM

Open Data Kit (ODK) is an open-source suite of tools that aids mobile data collection through customizable forms. Planners can build surveys using Excel-based templates (XLSForms), deploy them to mobile devices using ODK Collect, and sync submissions with a centralized server. ODK is widely used in humanitarian, public health, and environmental research fields, and supports offline data entry, skip logic, and multimedia attachments.

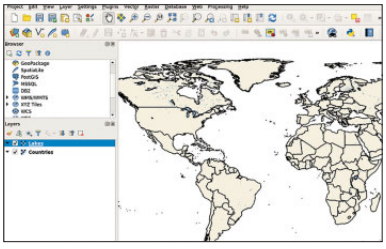
COST: ● Free self-hosted server (paid hosting available)
RESOURCE FORMATS: Tabular, geospatial
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No (form building in Excel; server setup optional)

KNIME

VISUAL WORKFLOW BUILDER | DATA ANALYSIS | MODEL DEVELOPMENT

KNIME is a free open-source platform that allows users to create data processing and analysis workflows using a drag-and-drop interface. Planners can analyze datasets, process text, calculate indicators, and even apply machine learning models—all without writing code. KNIME supports integrations with databases, REST APIs, and Python scripts, making it useful for both general data processing and more specialized tasks, including scenario modeling or risk profiling.

COST: ● Free (AI and collaboration features available with paid tiers)
RESOURCE FORMATS: Tabular, text, geospatial
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● No (for basic use); ● yes (for advanced functions)



MAPSERVER

GIS RENDERING ENGINE | OPEN-SOURCE PLATFORM | DATA HOSTING UTILITY

MapServer is an open-source platform developed by the University of Minnesota (U of M) for rendering spatial data and publishing interactive maps to the web. Maintained by the Open Source Geospatial Foundation, MapServer is lightweight and can be used on Windows, Linux, or Mac systems. While it does not function as a full GIS system, it supports planners like those at the U of M, who need to create web-based spatial data visualizations or host map services for project communication or analysis.

COST: ● Free
RESOURCE FORMATS: Geospatial
CODING SKILLS REQUIRED: ● Yes (basic familiarity with server setup and geospatial files)

Cynthia Albright, FAICP, CUD, GISP, was inducted into the AICP College of Fellows in 2022 and is an urban designer and geographic information systems professional. Lian Plass, AICP, is a senior manager of the urban resilience program at the Urban Land Institute and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

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

COURTESY ODK; KNIME; MAPSERVER

KIMBERLY NORONHA

VIEWPOINT

5 MEANINGFUL WAYS TO SUPPORT THE UNHOUSED

My firsthand experience with homelessness has shown me how planners can help. *By Chris Quattro, PhD, AICP*

THE NUMBER OF unhoused individuals and families in the U.S. keeps rising while the supply of affordable housing continues to fall short. The Department of Housing and Urban Development's point-in-time estimate puts the 2024 figure at 771,480 people nationwide, an 18 percent increase over 2023.

Recent natural disasters also show that the line between stable housing and homelessness is far thinner than many realize.

Local governments often struggle with the demands of building shelters, but there are other meaningful ways to make a difference. Subtle changes in policy, sharing public facilities, or making targeted investments in small-scale programs can improve the quality of life and sense of agency for unhoused people.

I speak from personal experience: Circumstances in my young adulthood resulted in a period of homelessness in my own life. My experiences during that time shaped my consideration of the dynamics between planners and how we serve transient residents.

Practical programs for planners

Recently, I revisited these experiences when my family was displaced twice after Hurricane Helene and a series of devastating ice storms in North Carolina's High Country. This reinforced how important it is for local governments to help ease the burden of homelessness and better support their citizens through times of crisis.

PUBLIC FACILITIES SUPPORT DIGNITY.

Too often, discussions of support for homelessness focus on the need to provide a bed for the night—but many shelters may not even open until evening hours, with patrons expected to leave again in the morning. This model ignores other essential bodily needs such as using restrooms and eating.

Local governments can support or share existing public facilities that address basic needs, like access to toilets and clean drinking water in parks, convention centers, or offices.

Many cities have already invested in different kinds of publicly available restrooms. One type is a pod-like bathroom that self-cleans. These are in use along the coast of San Francisco and in downtown San Antonio, Texas.

FOOD AND NUTRITION ARE VITAL.

It is easy to underestimate the value of a kitchen with a stove, microwave, sink, and clean eating utensils so that people can store and prepare nutritious foods like meat, dairy, and fresh produce. Without those amenities, healthy nutrition and food safety can be seriously compromised.

As planners, we commit to supporting the health, safety, and welfare of our residents, which must include opportunities for nutrition for all.

Many organizations are structured around filling this gap. It is common to see agencies that offer shelter services also providing or connecting with nutrition-focused programming.

Food pantries are a common community resource. Some local agencies, like Hospitality House, grow their own food on-site, purchase from local farmers, and partner with other nonprofit or faith-based organizations to generate a meal schedule. Pay-what-you-can food service programs, like those offered by F.A.R.M. Cafe, offer a healthy meal subsidized by patrons who can pay full price. Local governments can support these models by supplying space, labor coordination, and/or funding.

APPEARANCE GRANTS ACCESS. Critical public facilities like restrooms already exist in places such as shopping malls, parks, grocery stores, and businesses. However, I've learned that appearance grants access. In other words, well-dressed individuals with good hygiene are not typically questioned when they need to use the grocery store restroom.

Municipalities around the country are investing in portable laundry and shower services. These were among the first services deployed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency when disaster struck. Other organizations provide free clothing pantries or haircuts. Partnerships with fitness or health-care organizations with shower facilities can be a low-cost option, too.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BELONGINGS. Homes provide valuable space to store food, clothing, cleaning supplies, and other personal items. Meeting a person's long-term needs for hygiene, nutrition, and mental well-being also requires the ability for that individual to have secure storage.

Susana Mendez Segura and her mother are community activists in San Antonio who are dedicated to acquiring and distributing essential items like healthy food, blankets, and medicines to the unhoused population living in their community through their organization, Bread and Blankets Mutual Aid. However, the impact of this work is dictated by whether those individuals can safely store their belongings.

From top: Creating access to toilets in public spaces supports access to dignity; F.A.R.M. Cafe offers a healthy menu in the form of no- or low-cost meals.

CHRIS QUATTRO; COURTESY F.A.R.M. CAFE

Having a safe space to store personal belongings, particularly those of sentimental or real value, is an important amenity that unhoused individuals lack. Limited supplies can be carried, and sometimes bringing belongings inside can be restricted or draw unwanted attention. Leaving items unattended outside has a high risk of theft or disposal. Private storage units usually require a driver's license to rent, and in most states, a permanent address is required to have a driver's license. Therefore, this option may not be available for people experiencing homelessness—even if they can cover the costs.

Some facilities provide lockers. In Madison, Wisconsin, the nonprofit Friends of the State Street Family hosts a Keys to Dignity program offering locker storage to unhoused individuals that is accessible within the right-of-way. Denver, Colorado, offers a similar locker service in a municipal building, as does Berkeley, California, but with limited access hours and proof of ID. These partnerships help bridge the gap, with limited staff or funding needed.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MORAL SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL. Being unhoused can feel like there is no foundation to your life. The status of transience begins to seep into all aspects of living, and it is difficult to feel attached to anything as everything becomes temporary or borrowed. Therefore, having additional mental health support services to maintain a sense of self is a key goal for longevity.

Cities can start with training opportunities, such as those sponsored by the federal Homeless and Housing Resource Center. They also can support the work of established nonprofits through grants, use of public facilities, staff support, and fee waivers.

Addressing the needs of the unhoused in any community is a complex, long-term process. It's also not something that planners must do alone. Seek out people who are willing to help implement plans for direct community impact.

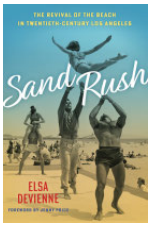
Chris Quattro, PHD, AICP, is an assistant professor at Appalachian State University's Community and Regional Planning program and works for a private land development law firm based in San Antonio, Texas.

PLANNERS LIBRARY

THE REVIVAL OF THE BEACH IN LOS ANGELES

A new book explores the past, present, and future of the quintessential California dream of coastal living.

Sand Rush explores the history of Los Angeles beaches, the lobbyists who helped create them, and the emerging threat from the changing climate.



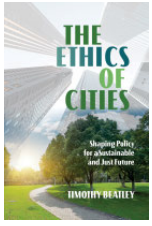
Sand Rush: The Revival of the Beach in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles

Elsa Devienne, 2024, Oxford University Press, 328 pp, $34.99

THIS BOOK TRACES Los Angeles's relationship with its famous beaches from the early 1900s through the 1960s, weaving together insights from cultural, environmental, and city planning history. The book has much to contribute to studies of urban development and city planning, especially Devienne's analysis of the beach lobby, which she argues emerged in the early 20th century in response to a perceived crisis on the coast.

It also contemplates the unfolding climate crisis of the 21st century. What will the California dream of coastal living and beachfront leisure look like as the climate crisis and rapid sea level rise increasingly threaten Los Angeles beaches?

—Kara Murphy Schlichting, Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York



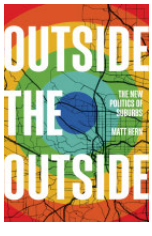
The Ethics of Cities: Shaping Policy for a Sustainable and Just Future

Timothy Beatley, 2024, University of North Carolina Press, 248 pp, $27.95

CAN A CITY be ethical? This book's main approach is to raise this question and more about how ethics might be applied to cities.

Early chapters explore philosophical concepts, such as teleological (consequences-based) and deontological (principles-based) ethical theory, values, the virtuous individual, citizenship, rights, and freedoms. However, the book's focus is not on philosophy but rather the application of a humanistic, environmentally oriented ethical viewpoint in planning. Other chapters consider policing and the use of force, surveillance and privacy, local democracy and shared governance, public spaces, public health, biophilic cities, and a city's duty to the future and the larger world.

—Stephen M. Wheeler, University of California, Davis



Outside the Outside: The New Politics of Suburbs

Matt Hern, 2024, Verso, 192 pp, $24.95

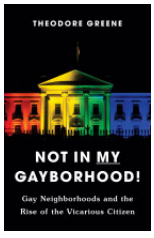
THIS BOOK IS an ambitious exploration of what it means to be suburban and calls for a reformulation of the dominant notion that suburbs are socially,

BENNYMARTY/ISTOCK EDITORIAL/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

culturally, and economically subordinate to urban centers. Instead, according to author Hern, suburbs—in their contemporary trend of being receivers for largely racialized and immigrant communities—have important stories to tell about migration, community, and struggle, stories that are more often neglected once the displaced exit the city.

Hern visits and examines several suburban locations including Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver; Gresham, a suburb of Portland, Oregon; and Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis made internationally famous for the uprisings after Michael Brown's murder by police.

—Lisa Berglund, Dalhousie University



Not in My Gayborhood! Gay Neighborhoods and the Rise of the Vicarious Citizen

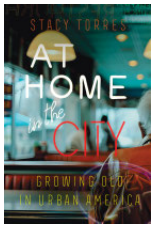
Theodore Greene, 2024, Columbia University Press, 320 pp, $32

THIS BOOK OFFERS a compelling exploration of the evolving dynamics of gay neighborhoods, particularly in Washington, D.C. Greene expands the concept of vicarious citizenship, describing how nonresidents actively engage with these neighborhoods, shaping their cultural and political vibrancy.

At a time when gentrification and displacement threaten marginalized communities, Greene challenges conventional notions of belonging by examining how vicarious citizens—former residents, allies, and others—continue to assert their presence in these spaces.

This book's implications for urban planning and policy are crucial in recognizing diverse forms of community engagement and advocating for policies that support both residents and nonresidents.

—Manish Chalana, University of Washington



At Home in the City: Growing Old in Urban America

Stacy Torres, 2025, University of California Press, 368 pp, $29.95

IN THE NEXT few decades, the population older than 65 in the U.S. is projected to increase to 73.1 million (20.6 percent) in 2030 and 80.8 million (21.6 percent) in 2040. While many authors have focused on aging in place, the loneliness crisis, so-called third places, and commercial gentrification, this book is an ethnographic study that combines all these aspects, focusing on third places.

Torres discusses the challenges of aging in New York City, including declining physical mobility; difficulties performing activities of daily living; fewer third places because of commercial gentrification; and losing friends, relatives, and familiar strangers due to aging. She focuses on how, why, and what facilitates developing a sense of connection and good networks of social ties in these third places, unpacking the multiple meanings of place.

—Katrin B. Anacker, George Mason University

APA members can read the full reviews, originally published in the Journal of the American Planning Association, *at planning.org/japa.*

OUT ON A LIMB

The federal government has axed funding for local urban forestry initiatives. How are communities adapting to the changing landscape?

By MARY HAMMON
Colorado photographs by MICHAEL CIAGLO

At an August 2025 event in Boulder, Colorado, young people from the Community Forestry Corps helped with tree planting and watering. Boulder planner and Senior Climate Policy Advisor Brett KenCairn (center right) demonstrates an innovative temporary watering technique that relies on fire hydrants for its supply.

Earlier this year in Butte, Montana, urban forester Trevor Peterson experienced the best—and worst—days of his career within two weeks.

In February, Peterson learned the Arbor Day Foundation had awarded the city an additional $600,000 in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) grant money from the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, on top of the $142,000 he had secured in late 2024 to remove 175 hazardous cottonwoods from the city's most popular public park and install three replacements for every tree removed.

"We were finally catching up after a hundred years of not planning for trees," says Peterson, the first tree professional in Butte's history.

Two weeks later, the federal grant funds were frozen before a final termination notice was given amid a Trump administration rollback of IRA-funded grants tied to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Peterson and Butte residents were devastated. For much of the city's history, mining and smelting industries used it as a dumping site, leaving its land and streams contaminated and neighborhoods nearly treeless. In the 1980s, Silver Bow Creek was declared the nation's largest Superfund site and remediation efforts began. Progress was made, but trees still struggle to grow, and city investment in and knowledge about trees—and their importance to the urban fabric—have suffered.

Butte's Urban Forestry Division of the Parks and Recreation Department operates on a city budget of $1,200 to $3,000 a year. "Everything else, I have to go out and get myself," Peterson says. Before the IRA grant, he had been awarded 14 grants over five years, the largest totaling $12,000.

The additional IRA grant funds would have helped to hire interns and additional seasonal staff, which would have given Peterson time to update Butte's 10-year urban forest master plan, already two years overdue. Without the funding support, progress has stalled, and Peterson has been left juggling many ongoing projects.

The federal government reimbursed about $50,000 of Butte's original grant before canceling the Arbor Day Foundation's IRA funding. That money was used to purchase professional-grade equipment and remove 68 of the dead or dying trees, as well as buy and plant almost 200 new replacement trees. However, more than 100 dangerous trees remain standing—some with only half an inch of live wood holding them upright—and Peterson doesn't have the resources to finish the job.

"You never want to have hazardous trees in any park," he says. "If a tree fell and injured somebody, I would never forgive myself."

Boom to bust

Butte's experience mirrors a broader national trend: Cities across the country are struggling to keep tree canopy initiatives alive amid federal funding instability.

It's vastly different from the atmosphere in 2023, when urban forestry advocates celebrated the IRA's passage. The legislation earmarked $1.5 billion for the USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program—a historic infusion of funds intended to support planting and caring for trees in low-canopy, historically underserved neighborhoods, which suffer disproportionately from urban heat islands, poor air quality, and related health problems, as well as stormwater issues. The funds were awarded to 12 pass-through organizations, such as the Arbor Day Foundation, to distribute via grants to local communities and projects.

"These communities have long been waiting for this kind of relief," says Beattra Wilson, PhD, then-assistant director for cooperative forestry at the U.S. Forest Service, during a keynote at the 2023 Hixon Center Urban Conference shortly after USDA awarded $1 billion of that funding as grants to 385 communities. Another $250 million was earmarked for states to distribute.

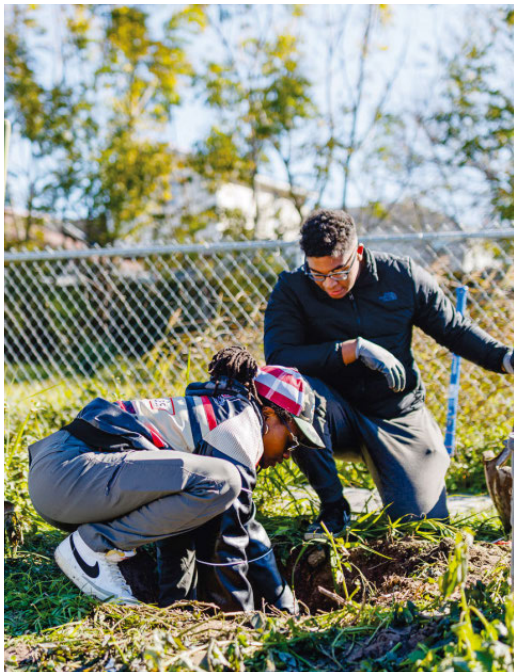
That momentum faltered in early 2025 when the Trump administration froze and then cut billions in grants, including approximately $75 million in U&CF funds administered by the Arbor Day Foundation.

The IRA funding for urban forestry "was a recognition that we have historically not invested sufficiently in this critical infrastructure, and it was just walked back," says Brett KenCairn, senior policy advisor for climate and environment for Boulder, Colorado, and founder of the nonprofit Center for Regenerative Solutions.

COURTESY TREVOR PETERSON

Trevor Peterson (below left), the urban forester for Butte's parks and recreation department, says that work to remove old and decaying cottonwood trees and replace them with sturdier species stopped when the grant funding was frozen earlier in 2025.

Susannah Burley (below right), leads SOUL in New Orleans, which plants and maintains trees in areas of the city devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, including the Ninth Ward.



The full scope of the cuts remains unclear. In June, the USDA announced it had cut $148.6 million in funding for more than 145 awards, including a $192,246 project to "create a new urban model for urban forestry to lead environmental justice through more equitable distributed green spaces," but the press release was light on details. At press time, the USDA Forest Service had neither published nor responded to *Planning* requests for a comprehensive list of canceled awards or the total amount of urban forestry funding that has been rescinded.

Two of the 12 U&CF pass-through organizations—the Arbor Day Foundation and Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)—have sued USDA to have their grants reinstated. Funding for others, such as American Forests, remains in place. The same uncertainty applies to IRA dollars distributed to states for local tree efforts through the program.

Even harder to quantify are the ripple effects from cuts to agencies beyond forestry. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency, which supports urban forestry in addition to other environmental and climate programs, recently canceled more than 600 environmental justice grants worth $2.4 billion.

Back to square one

Hundreds of local initiatives are now back where they started. Officials from Cary, North Carolina, told *Planning* in a statement that it had discontinued its Branching Out program after losing a $1 million federal grant. Others, like the Sustaining Our Urban Landscape (SOUL) reforestation initiative in New Orleans, have paused operations while they patch together resources to stay afloat. Advocates say the fallout will be far-reaching and long-lasting.

"After decades of research, we know that every dollar spent on tree planting and care provides 10 times a return on investment in terms of improvements to human health, reduced wear-and-tear on infrastructure, lower energy bills, absorbing the acute impacts from extreme heat and flooding, and dozens of other societal benefits," Vivek Shandas wrote in an email to *Planning*.

Shandas, a professor at Portland State University and a member of the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, warns that the federal cuts will result in measurable harm to communities, especially those already facing health, economic, and environmental challenges.

Hundreds of local initiatives are now back where they started. Others have paused operations while they patch together resources to stay afloat.

SOUL's executive director, Susannah Burley, agrees. "Trees are barometers for wealth and health, and areas with concentrated poverty don't have them," she says.

Her organization was a year into implementing New Orleans's $12.5 million reforestation plan when its grant, administered through the Arbor Day Foundation, was canceled. The goal of the plan, which won an American Society of Landscape Architects Honor award in 2023, is to grow the tree canopy by at least 10 percent of its landscape. Funding comes from local allocations, bonds, private foundations, corporate donors, and federal grants.

"The Arbor Day Foundation grant was game-changing," Burley says. It would have allowed SOUL to finish planting in the Lower Ninth Ward, the neighborhood hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina.

The grant cancellation forced the organization to cancel tree orders and suspend planting operations. SOUL was a week from closing when the Bloomberg Foundation awarded SOUL a $250,000 emergency grant in April 2025. SOUL plans to use part of the money to fund watering efforts for trees SOUL already planted—a critical investment as 34 percent of street trees die within two years—and resume planting in the Lower Ninth next season. SOUL has also hired a development staffer to fundraise locally.

"We don't have the strongest economic base here," Burley says. "The same small group of funders is hit up by everyone. There's only so much to dole out, but people from New Orleans love to support New Orleans."

COURTESY ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION; HURRICANE KATRINA: BRIANNOLAN/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS; VINCENT LAFORET/*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

Saved by coalition

In Ohio, the Cleveland Tree Coalition lost a $600,000 Arbor Day Foundation grant intended for public education, engagement, and outreach—one of four priority areas in its ambitious five-year strategic plan, which was developed between 2022 and 2023.

"It was a very different time in the urban forestry federal funding landscape," Sara Tillie, the coalition's director, says.

Fortunately, the coalition operates on a collective impact model, which provides insulation from shifting federal priorities. Originally developed by social scientists, the collective impact model aligns diverse organizations with shared goals. According to Tillie, who worked in public health before earning her master's in urban planning, the model makes a lot of sense for all kinds of community-based work.

"We have a structure in place where there's trust and partnership," Tillie says. "We've been talking about how we can stitch together little pockets of funding or people to solve for the holes left behind by federal cuts."

The model relies on nonprofits, city agencies, businesses, and academic institutions contributing different resources. Each partner brings something different—lobbyists, viewpoints, access to funds. "That is just so vital to us in finding paths forward," she says.

Individual coalition members still face their own challenges. For example, a few partners took a staffing hit when the Trump administration terminated nearly $400 million in grant program funding from AmeriCorps. "But the collective structure makes it possible to adapt as a whole," Tillie says.

A path forward

With more federal cuts looming, urban forestry advocates are bracing for continued instability. "I wouldn't apply for any other federal funding that's reimbursable-based during this administration," says SOUL's Burley.

Waiting for more favorable political winds, though, isn't always a viable option—especially in a field where progress takes decades.

Some states and cities have stepped up. Massachusetts launched its Cool Corridors grant program in March, awarding $1.3 million for shade-tree planting in heat-vulnerable areas. Seattle expanded municipal reforestation efforts in July. Other cities introduced local greening legislation.

Still, there's no substitute for sustained federal investment.

"We ultimately have to see this as a local priority," says KenCairn, who leads Boulder's nature-based solutions team and has a master's degree in urban planning. "It has to be part of what we recognize as critical infrastructure."

That shift requires mindset changes and structural reforms. Advocates say building broad coalitions, supporting public-private partnerships, and investing in local capacity will be key to long-term resilience.

"Urban forests don't just happen," says Alana Tucker, AICP, senior director of tree equity strategy and partnerships at American Forests, one of the 12 U&CF passthrough organizations. (Tucker also is a policy co-chair for APA's Sustainable Communities Division.)

Through American Forests' Tree Equity Alliance, her team aims to connect urban forestry to all sectors, including the built environment,

7 WAYS URBAN PLAN

With federal funding uncertain, tea

1. GET INVOLVED

Alana Tucker, AICP, a senior director at American Forests, says planners play a key role in urban forestry. "If you're a planner not currently involved in urban forestry efforts, get involved," says Tucker, who also serves as policy co-chair for APA's Sustainable Communities Division. Tree inventories, canopy analyses, and urban forest master plans depend on planning expertise, she says.

2. TREAT TREES AS CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

When budgets shrink, trees are often the first cut in development projects. Sara Tillie, director of the Cleveland Tree Coalition, stresses a mindset shift. "We need to move from thinking of trees as a nice-to-have to thinking of them as a must-have. Trees aren't just amenities or landscaping—they're infrastructure." She also recommends including maintenance plans and long-term care funding for trees at the outset of every project.

NERS CAN HELP GROW LOCAL URBAN FORESTRY EFFORTS

ming up with urban foresters can achieve joint outcomes. BY MARY HAMMON

Alana Tucker, AICP, is the senior director of tree equity strategy and partnerships at American Forests.

COURTESY ALANA TUCKER

3. INTEGRATE TREES INTO PLANNING PROCESSES

Tree canopy targets should be included in comprehensive plans, climate strategies, and housing projects, according to Tucker. "Tree inequities are a planning problem created by the history of redlining in our cities," she says, but they also present an opportunity. Integrating trees into city plans can help address environmental health, economic disparities, and community resilience. "That's why I do what I do as a planner working in urban forestry," Tucker adds. "I really see urban forests as one of the trickiest planning challenges—but solutions exist within."

4. CREATE LAND USE POLICIES WITH TREES IN MIND

"Planning is everything to a successful urban forest program," says Trevor Peterson, urban forester in Butte-Silver Bow County, Montana. He highlights zoning codes, site plan reviews, and clear standards for planting conditions, species selection, and space allocation. For guidance, Peterson recommends *Up by Roots: Healthy Soils and Trees in the Built Environment* by James Urban. "Every planner should read it," Peterson says. "It's like the bible of urban forestry and trees."

5. QUANTIFY TREE BENEFITS

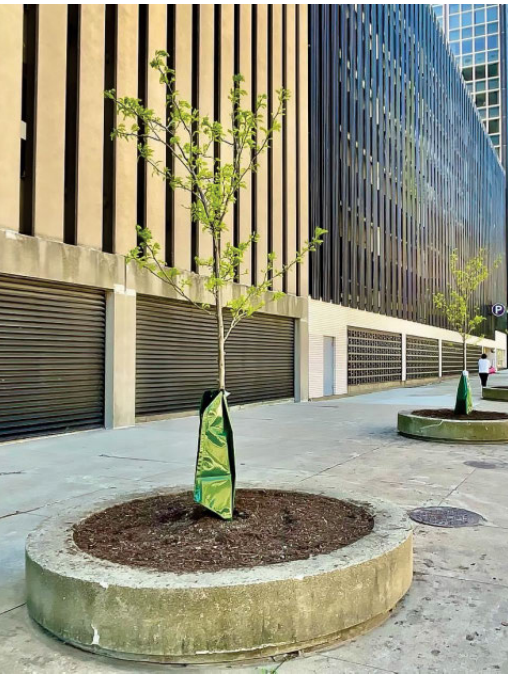
To secure funding and support for urban forestry efforts, planners must demonstrate measurable results. "You have to show your city council the link between heat islands and canopy gaps in your own community, not just cite an academic paper," says Brett KenCairn, a senior climate policy advisor in Boulder, Colorado. "That connection will ultimately determine whether people care enough to fund natural infrastructure like trees," he adds. Tools like American Forests' Tree Equity Score and the Department of Agriculture Forest Service's i-Tree can help map canopy gaps and measure benefits.

6. BUILD CROSS-SECTOR COALITIONS

"Urban forestry doesn't fit neatly into a single department," Tucker says. "We need planning, public works, public health, and urban forestry all at the same table." Planners can lead by bringing together public works, public health, housing agencies, and workforce development offices, as well as local private-sector partners and organizations.

7. DON'T WAIT

Like planning, planting trees is a long-term investment. "You plant today for benefits 100 years from now," Tillie says. Protecting and maintaining existing trees is just as important as planting new ones. "If you have to cut down a decades-old tree, think about how long it's going to take to replace it," she says.



Planner Sara Tillie (top center) is the director of the Cleveland Tree Coalition, a collective that recently lost a major Arbor Day grant. It is nonetheless finding a path forward, in part because of the collective model, which relies on nonprofits, city agencies, businesses, and academic institutions to fund its work.

to help build policy and funding models that treat trees as living infrastructure. Tools like the Tree Equity Score help cities map canopy coverage alongside heat risk, income, and health vulnerabilities.

"Trees sit at this beautiful intersection of so many mutual and aligned interests—public health, transportation, housing, energy, equity," Tucker says, adding that urban forestry advocates need to tap into that intersectionality to make the case that trees are living infrastructure in our cities and need to be funded as such.

That kind of cross-sector effort is already underway in Boulder, Colorado, where local partnerships—not federal dollars—sustain the city's Community Forestry Corps. Launched in 2024 as a pilot for a scalable program developed by the USDN, Boulder hires young people to plant and care for trees in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods while collecting data about their impact.

In early 2024, USDN awarded grants to help 15 cities nationwide launch similar programs, but Boulder's effort wasn't eligible: Conflict-of-interest rules prevented funding because a city staffer had helped design the program.

"I was just like, 'are you kidding me?' We were the ones who provided the proof of concept," KenCairn says. "So we said we're going to figure out a way to fund it ourselves. Which, it turns out, was a good thing. We're running a program this summer, and nobody else is."

To fund the program, Boulder turned to its existing local network of urban forestry stakeholders. The Play Boulder Foundation, a member of the larger Cool Boulder Campaign, stepped up to run and fund the corps through its Tree Trust program. Cool Boulder is a coalition of 50 local nonprofit organizations and private companies that launched in 2022 to work collaboratively with city departments to expand urban forestry and promote what KenCairn describes as a long-term local "culture of care" for trees and urban landscapes.

"We have to remember that cities typically control less than 20 percent of the natural infrastructure of a community, so we have think about how we set up entities, infrastructure, and capacity to motivate and support activity in the private sector as well," he says. "None of it works without having that infrastructure community support already in place."

Lawsuits challenging the cuts might eventually restore some funding, as cities and states brace for what could be a permanent recalibration of federal support.

Bracing for final impact

Back in Butte, Peterson is patching together what he can. He hopes to keep building his department's budget through local channels and additional public and private grants, but it won't come close to replacing what was lost.

"That IRA money was going to set us up," Peterson says. He hopes to finish his career in Butte. "Without it, I'm not going to make near as much progress as I want. I feel like I'm failing every day. So much needs to be done."

Lawsuits challenging the cuts might eventually restore some urban forestry funding, but no one is counting on it. At press time, the president's proposed fiscal year 2026 budget would cut the U.S. Forest Service's discretionary budget by 65 percent and eliminate its State, Private, and Tribal Forestry Program—a key source of assistance for non-federal forest owners and local communities alike.

The Forest Service's budget request framed the move as a shift in responsibility, saying it will "ensure fiscal responsibility with American taxpayer dollars and to better balance the appropriate roles of federal and state governments," and "that local governments should be empowered to fund their urban forestry efforts in alignment with local priorities."

That rationale signals a likely trend for the remainder of this administration, as cities and states brace for what could be a permanent recalibration of federal support.

Mary Hammon, a former editor of Planning*, is a freelance writer and editor in Chicago.*

COURTESY CLEVELAND TREE COALITION; SKYLINE: ERIK DROST/FLICKR

WHEN PAST IS PROLOGUE

Where pain lingers, trauma-informed planning is helping communities heal.

By PATRICK SISSON

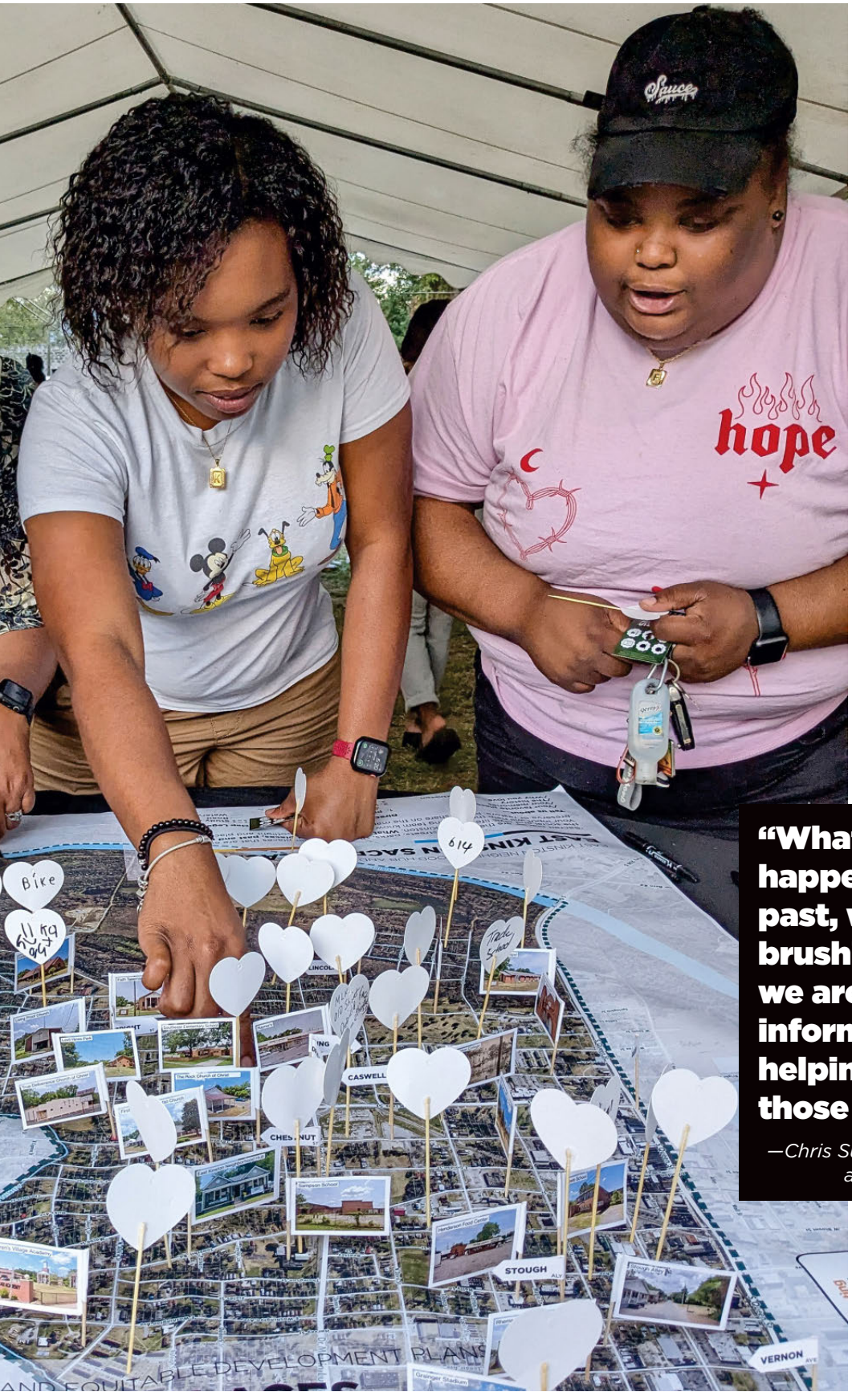
KINSTON, A CLOSE-KNIT community of 20,000 in eastern North Carolina, was once nicknamed the tobacco capital of the world before deindustrialization in the 1970s led to job losses and empty warehouses. More recently, the aftereffects of five hurricanes over the past 25 years left the community feeling "blow after blow," says Chris Suggs, a lifelong resident and city council member.

Kinston's hardships also affected young people in the community, who in 2014 were suffering from the impact of gun violence, gang activity, and neighborhood disinvestment. That year, Suggs, when he was just 14, founded Kinston Teens to give a voice to his peers. It came during a time when there were as many as 61 shootings in a year, and some of his friends and classmates were victims.

It was his hope that Kinston Teens could position those affected by traumatic events in the community to help design, develop, and implement solutions by getting members engaged in local planning projects. They started by working with city staffers in 2014 on a downtown street revitalization plan.

However, when the group decided to celebrate its 10th anniversary by designing and developing a more responsive piece of civic infrastructure, Suggs decided to call on another collaborator: Design Workshop. The landscape architecture and planning firm had created a new master plan for Emma Webb Park in Kinston in 2021, working with Kinston Teens to facilitate community engagement.

Kinston Teens and Design Workshop imagined the new project, the East Kinston Neighborhood Hub, as a social service and community center that would incorporate multi-use spaces, gardens, play spaces, and a commercial kitchen to support local entrepreneurs. It would also be designed to function as a disaster hub during future flooding incidents.



In a Kinston, North Carolina, mapping exercise, teens and adults are the experts. The activity creates space for intergenerational storytelling and forming trust through healing.

"Whatever has happened in the past, we're not just brushing over it, but we are making plans informed by and helping to reconcile those traumas."

—Chris Suggs, city council member and founder, Kinston Teens

COURTESY DESIGN WORKSHOP

"We had a great rapport with them," Suggs says of working with planning professionals and architects on the Design Workshop team, who treated community members not as clients but as co-leaders.

The way the community's past was woven into the Kinston project's new vision of social infrastructure is an example of trauma-informed planning.

The roots of this approach come from health care and human services to help those who have experienced highly stressful experiences by focusing on six key principles: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and attention to cultural, historical, and gender issues. When applied to community development, planners can factor in the multi-generational trauma of a place and rely more on collaborations with community groups to try to mitigate potential future harm and foster resilience.

Krista Schroeder, a researcher and professor at Temple University and author of the *PAS QuickNotes* "Trauma-Informed Planning," has studied the health impacts of trauma. She found that much of the research and literature was focused on the individual, not the built environment.

"Trauma-informed planning builds on what's normally done," Schroeder says. "It explicitly considers how we can build an environment and use a process to best support their well-being, including health and human services and child welfare. What does that neighborhood block look like?"

"Trauma-informed planning explicitly considers how we can build an environment and use a process to best support their well-being."

—Krista Schroeder, researcher and professor, Temple University

Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 brought into sharp focus how community members in Richmond, Virginia, have struggled with their local history. The statue of Robert E. Lee has since been removed.

MPI34/MEDIA PUNCH/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

Planning a safe space

In 2019, Suggs testified during a congressional hearing that hurricanes and repeated flooding of the Neuse River had cut Kinston in half and left neighborhoods barren. "For these catastrophic events to happen at such a fast rate, a rate that my community can't recover from, is deeply alarming," he said.

Suggs says Design Workshop made the effort to understand the social and political factors, which helped build trust. Previous planning efforts failed to deliver on their promises and community members felt like the community's trauma was being ignored, he adds.

The firm's staff trained Kinston Teens members how to host workshops and focus groups, allowing them to gain the skills and experience needed to listen and translate the community's needs into insights in the planning process. "It ensured that whatever has happened in the past, we're not just brushing over it, but that we are making plans informed by and helping to reconcile those traumas," Suggs says.

Emily McCoy, principal at Design Workshop, says employing the co-creation model was key to success. When helping a community heal from trauma, she says it's vital to empower instead of taking the lead.

This was true of the Design Workshop Foundation's work to create green infrastructure plans in the Globeville community of Denver, Colorado. The neighborhood has long been plagued by significant health disparities and environmental pollution, from smelters and industrial plants to vehicle emissions. It lacks green space, pedestrian and bike infrastructure, parks, and trees and has only a three percent tree canopy cover.

The immigrant-heavy, working-class neighborhood was also carved up by highway expansion in the 1960s and '70s.

When the roadways were constructed, about one-third of an acre of planting beds was set adjacent to the large walls lining the roadways. The Design Workshop Foundation spent the past two years working with community groups, including the Birdseed Collective, to develop plans to irrigate, manage, and develop these spaces while creating new neighborhood green space. Although some Environmental Protection Agency funding to fully develop, landscape, and build out these spaces was frozen by the federal government recently, $80,000 in local funding has been raised—enough to set up a new stewardship model, local control, and irrigation.

The firm deliberately did its work in the background, listening to community leaders and helping submit grant applications, says Sarah Konradi, executive director of the Design Workshop Foundation. "We've worked very hard and very carefully to build that trust over the last two years," following the community's lead and vision for what their neighborhood could become, she says.

Trauma's impact on cities

Trauma-informed planning can better inform design possibilities, says Courtney Knapp, a professor of planning at Pratt University in Brooklyn, New York, who studies and practices trauma-informed planning in their own work.

Notably, Knapp's work isn't just focused on things like markers or physical monuments to events. It's about creating policy, developing design guidelines, and building neighborhood power over its own planning destiny.

One of Knapp's early projects in Tennessee, the Planning Free School of Chattanooga, helped establish a neighborhood-led planning team to shape the debate about local development. "I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist, but these questions about harm and punishment are at the nucleus of our nation—at least its history," Knapp says. "I always end up coming back to these questions, no matter where I work."

Knapp says this approach is often seen as outside the scope of traditional land use planning or housing economic development planning, but the work has proceeded,

including exploring how community members in Richmond, Virginia, have struggled to acknowledge the city's role in slavery, the Confederacy, and the Civil War.

There, Knapp studied feedback from 800 residents and found that regardless of where residents stood on the issue of monuments to Confederate-era leaders and events, all spoke about common themes of family, pride, trust, and shame.

This provided insight to start conversations with a common thread on both sides of the debate: a desire for respect for one's family and ancestors. It also informed plans and proposals to turn Monument Avenue into a more vibrant public space (although little has been done since the city began removing Confederate statues in 2020).

"In cities, a huge issue that gets in the way of things is trust," Knapp says. "For me, doing the homework is about knowing where we've been but also trying to really get at what's going on in a community in terms of trust and social cohesion."

McCoy says that for traditional planning departments to adopt these strategies, they often must be self-aware enough to simply get out of the way. That's why Kinston Teens—not Design Workshop—ran 15 facilitation events. "We use the best data out there and our listening skills to really be the pen for the community to get their vision on property on paper," she says.

Deterred but not defeated

Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions and processes, Kinston has found itself disappointed again. The community hub project depended on a pair of federal grants that the Trump administration appears to have canceled.

However, Suggs says the setback won't be the end of their work. Their strategic planning process included alternatives for more gradual growth timelines and other ways to expand that didn't require grant money.

McCoy says that was by design. Trauma-informed planning also means being realistic and upfront about funding challenges and being honest about meeting basic needs. "If we were a traditional urban design and planning firm and didn't listen first, we would have come in with these catalytic projects that would have looked really sexy and maybe would have spurred some big economic engine," she says, "but we wanted to listen to the real basic needs the community has."

4 WAYS TO ENGAGE AND BUILD TRUST

When trauma has built up in a community, planners need to be self-aware enough to listen first and act later to find meaningful solutions. Sarah Konradi, executive director of Design Workshop Foundation, offers four ways to engage and build trust.

1. EXPAND THE STANDARD SCOPE

Planners can bring value beyond the typical project scope by applying their skill sets to support broader community needs. This includes facilitating partnership development, building local capacity, and contributing to organizational strategic planning.

2. BUILD ALLIANCES THAT ENHANCE RESPONSIVENESS

Partnering with academic institutions can help identify community needs, foster trust, and support strategic components of a project, particularly in under-resourced communities, which ultimately maximizes limited resources and expands access to technical assistance.

3. DESIGN FOR A FUTURE STATE

Planners can craft outputs that empower communities to take their next steps. Frameworks grounded in grassroots collaboration and relationship-building can unlock new opportunities for impact by recognizing that systemic change often begins with small, meaningful conversations.

4. PLAN TO ALIGN WITH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

To support implementation, plans should anticipate and align with potential grant funding. This includes providing ready-to-use narrative language and visual content that communities can adapt for proposals—ensuring they are equipped to pursue funding opportunities as they arise.

Trauma-informed planning also means being realistic and upfront about funding challenges and being honest about meeting basic needs.

DIVINE RAMAZANI

In the Globeville neighborhood of Denver, two years of community effort to reduce the impact of a superhighway has blossomed into a funded, multi-neighborhood grassroots green infrastructure movement.

That's why capacity-building and long-term planning are so important, Schroeder adds. This is hard work to do well, and the best solutions often come with meaningful, gradual change.

"As trauma has become more common in the general discourse, whether it's public health or it's planning, there's a rush to do more trauma work," she says. "But it's hard to do well, and you want to make sure you're doing it in a way that's comprehensive, sustainable, and long term. It takes a little more buy-in than saying, 'Let's throw a healing park in this neighborhood.'"

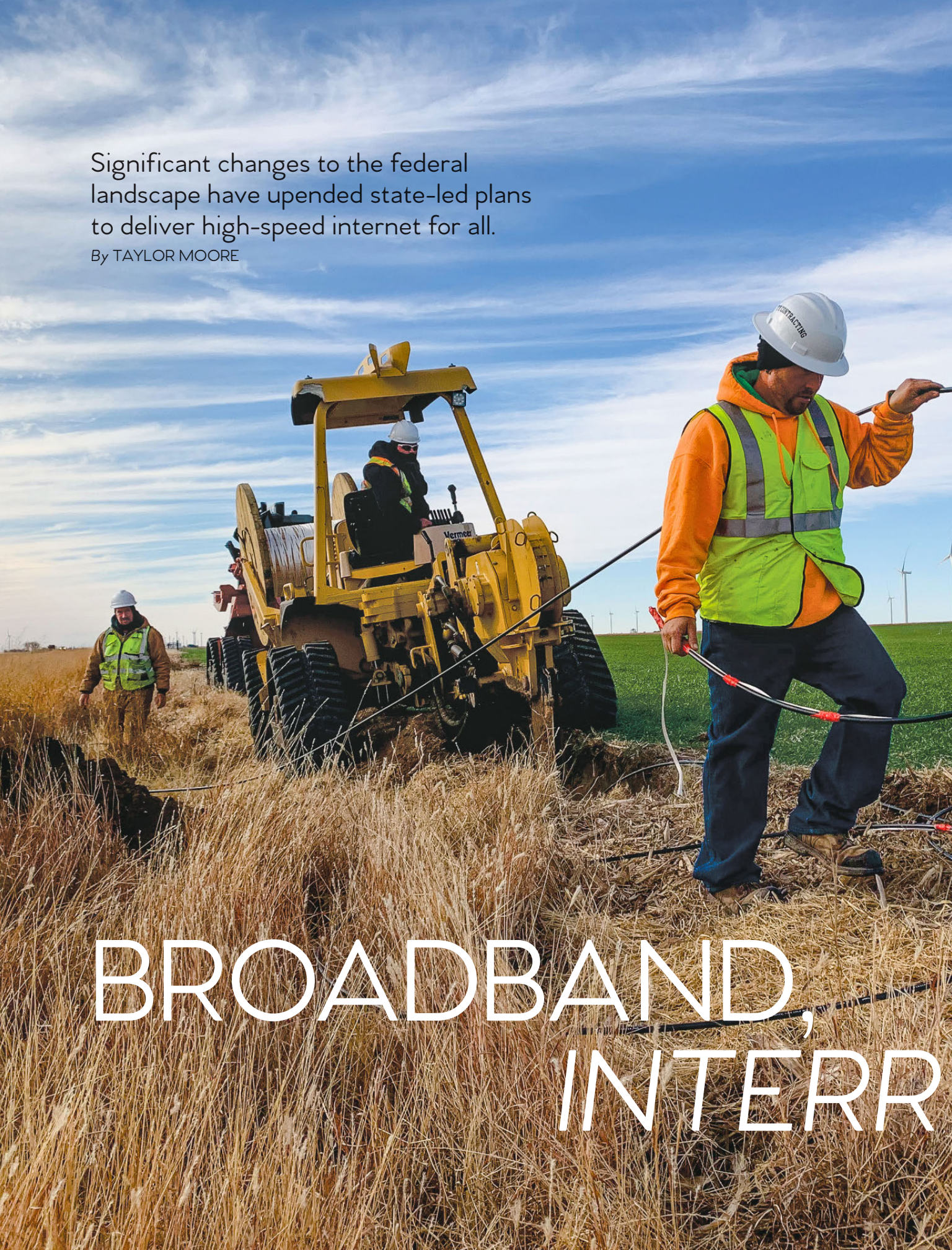
Currently, Kinston Teens is expanding its staff and capacity. It recently redesigned an abandoned local church to serve as another neighborhood community center. The group has also started a community garden—another key aspect of the neighborhood hub.

"This has helped shift some of the local perceptions about what community planning is," Suggs says. "It also excites me that the professionals want to learn more about how they can reach more people and be more beneficial."

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

Significant changes to the federal landscape have upended state-led plans to deliver high-speed internet for all.

By TAYLOR MOORE



BROADBAND, *INTERR*

Near Spearville, Kansas, fiber-optic lines will bring broadband to several towns in Ford County with populations of just a few hundred people.
COURTESY IDEATEK

UPTED

AT A TIME WHEN UP TO 22 MILLION Americans live without high-speed internet, the $42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program could expand internet access to those unserved or underserved by current technologies.

But BEAD, which was passed under the Biden administration as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, has been met with delays and changes—including in early June, when the Trump administration announced several updates to the program, including moving away from a fiber preference and removing mandates related to employment, labor, and climate change.

Now, planners are tasked with finding ways to not only implement local policies amidst changing guidance but also to find opportunities for funding.

Possible funding challenges ahead

The federal government has long funded broadband access through programs run by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Treasury Department, Department of Agriculture, and other agencies, with some focusing on rural areas, tribes, and underserved communities. The Tribal Broadband and Connectivity Program, for example, has already awarded $1.78 billion to nearly 200 tribal communities.

BEAD represents the largest infusion of funding ever, giving wide latitude to the states and territories in how to disburse funds to cities, towns, and tribes and which technologies to use. All 50 states, D.C., and the five U.S. territories have approved broadband plans.

It was intended by Congress to be a 10-year program that could withstand turnover of administrations, but on his first day in office in January 2025, President Donald Trump paused all grant funding related to the IIJA through an executive order. Two days later, his administration clarified that the pause only applied to energy-related projects. Trump's freeze on

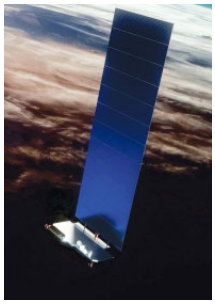
federal spending was later rescinded after a federal judge blocked the action.

Trump and his allies have been critical of the program's delay in getting off the ground; its requirement that states write equity-focused policies, particularly for internet affordability; and its preference for end-to-end fiber. Before he was reelected, Trump signaled his preference for low-Earth orbit satellite internet, potentially using Elon Musk's Starlink system.

In March, new U.S. Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick said his department would conduct a "rigorous review" of BEAD. On June 6, the administration unveiled sweeping changes to the program in a notice sent out by NTIA. This includes making BEAD a technology-neutral program to "bring the full force of the competitive marketplace to bear and allow American taxpayers to obtain the greatest return on their investment," stated the NTIA news release announcing the changes.

The new guidance also requires states to conduct at least one more BEAD subgrantee selection round. Dubbed the "Benefit of the Bargain Round," state BEAD programs "must permit all applicants—regardless of technology employed or prior participation in the program—to compete on a level playing field undistorted by the non-statutory regulatory burdens eliminated," according to the policy notice, and they "must rescind all preliminary and provisional subaward selections and notify applicants that a further round of applications will be considered before final awards are made." State programs will have 90 days to comply before submitting their final proposals.

Prior to these changes being announced, more than 100 lawmakers in 28 states sent a letter to Lutnick in April urging him to make any changes to the BEAD program optional instead of mandatory. "One in four rural residents do not have access to broadband. But they are about to," the state legislators wrote. "State BEAD and [other] programs have been designed by and for state stakeholders, and they are poised to bring high-speed, reliable, affordable, and scalable broadband to virtually every last one of our constituents. Please respect the results of this process. At this late stage, major changes would undermine our work and delay deployment by years."



Low-Earth orbit satellites, such as the Starlink system operated by SpaceX (above) are among the choices communities now must consider under BEAD. Before, fiber was the preference.

COURTESY STARLINK

Broadband internet remains an urgent issue once the pandemic moved everyday things online, such as government services, medical appointments, schools, and workplaces. "Prior to the pandemic, having access to high-speed internet was seen as a luxury by many," says Daniel Holbrook, AICP, broadband manager for Business Oregon. "But when everyone was staying home and trying to redo their lives virtually, those who had it were able to do that, and those who weren't were separated."

Building across all terrains

Projects funded by BEAD will be expensive, because they're tackling the most remote reaches of the U.S. "If I'm going to build for internet access down a road with 10 houses on it, I can probably make an internet service provider's business case for doing that," says Eric Frederick, a planner and the chief connectivity officer of the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office. "If there's only two houses on that mile-long road, that makes it a lot more challenging. The number of locations is probably one of the biggest challenges, which is why the government stepped in to fund this infrastructure."

Likewise, Holbrook says, "In Oregon, we have some parts that have great soil that make it very affordable to go underground, and then we have other parts that are just solid basalt—volcanic rock—which is very expensive."

Existing infrastructure must be considered, which might incur "make-ready" costs. For example, Brandy Reitter, executive director of the Colorado Broadband Office, says many communities in Colorado form electrical co-ops, using utility poles that could accommodate fiber, but because the poles were installed 40 to 50 years ago, they need to be repaired or brought up to code. Some need replacement at $9,000 per pole.

Reitter also suggests that planners implement or abide by dig-once policies, which encourage public works departments to install small, empty pipes for internet usage during already-planned construction projects for streets, sidewalks, and

sewers. Meanwhile, planners also need to know where broadband already exists. Since 2011, the FCC has tracked internet service through its National Broadband Map, which remains "the source of truth for every broadband program across the country," Reitter says.

Experts tell *Planning* that the FCC map, which released its latest iteration in 2022, has improved by leaps and bounds, but, Reitter says, there are still inaccuracies inherent to the map's data source.

The data remains self-reported by internet service providers, which, some argue, are motivated to misrepresent coverage to avoid providing service in areas that might be expensive or unprofitable to connect to the network. Reitter says that about 30 percent of the time the map overstates broadband coverage. "The new map is a huge improvement over where the FCC was, but we leverage it as a tool among many tools," she says.

Many states supplement the national map with data provided by municipalities or collected by their broadband offices. Frederick says a contractor's group of engineers drove 65,000 miles of road in Michigan to verify which areas had visible broadband infrastructure, such as fiber pedestals and telephone poles.

COMMUNITIES IN NEED OF CONNECTION

Large areas of Michigan can apply for the state's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program funding. The darkest purple shades on this map indicate concentrations of funding eligibility.

SOURCE: MICHIGAN HIGH-SPEED INTERNET OFFICE

Making the internet accessible to all

Despite the progress that had previously been made, the recent changes to BEAD have left state broadband offices scrambling to determine their next steps. "The new guidance undoes the last three years' worth of work" Frederick says. "Major policy shifts in the BEAD program will absolutely slow the program down, and the unserved and underserved rural areas of the nation will continue to be left behind."

The infrastructure is just one piece of the puzzle, though. "In order to have a healthy broadband ecosystem, you need to not only have the infrastructure available, but it also needs to be affordable to households," says Danny Fuchs, who leads the digital opportunity practice at HR&A Advisors.

"It's really important that as planners develop their community plans, they understand the barriers to economic opportunity as a result of a lack of broadband access so that they can plan for the benefits of that connectivity."

NTIA administers grants for digital equity, which funds programs to assist low-income households, aging populations, incarcerated people, veterans, people with disabilities, people with language barriers, racial and ethnic minorities, and residents of rural areas. These projects can teach people how to make telehealth appointments, establish computer labs with free internet access, and create digital literacy programs for K–12 students. Even those grants, though, may face challenges. Frederick says this is a major area where planners can be helpful, using their stakeholder engagement experience to bring organizations together. "The digital equity piece is absolutely critical," he says. "We can argue about fiber versus satellite, or this speed and that speed, until we are blue in the face. But at the end of the day, it's the person that we're connecting that is using the internet to improve their life—whether it's for education or health care or simply watching Netflix. You're enabled and empowered to go do this now because you have this connection."

Taylor Moore is a freelance journalist based in Chicago.

ALBERT TING

‘ENDLESS SUMMER’

Washington, D.C.

THE NATION’S CAPITAL SWELTERS in the summer, and a changing climate is only making it worse. Near the busy, tree-less rail lines and commercial corridors of Northeastern D.C., temperatures can spike 17 degrees higher than greener parts of the city. Planner and artist Andrea Limauro’s 2,000-square-foot mural “Endless Summer” acts as a warning about the deadliest climate phenomenon in the country, a growing danger that hits vulnerable communities the hardest. The colorful artwork, located in an airy atrium that acts as a cooling refuge near the popular Metropolitan Branch Trail, also is a vital third space. In creating a beautiful, calming place to chill (quite literally) Limauro hopes users also will consider how urban design and architecture can be part of the solution.

Andrea Limauro, an artist who also is a resilience planner for the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment, created “Endless Summer” as one in a four-part “Climate of Future Past” series. (Got a climate win-win that makes your Community Green? Tell us about it: email mstromberg @planning.org.)

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