THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

WINTER 2026

PLANNING

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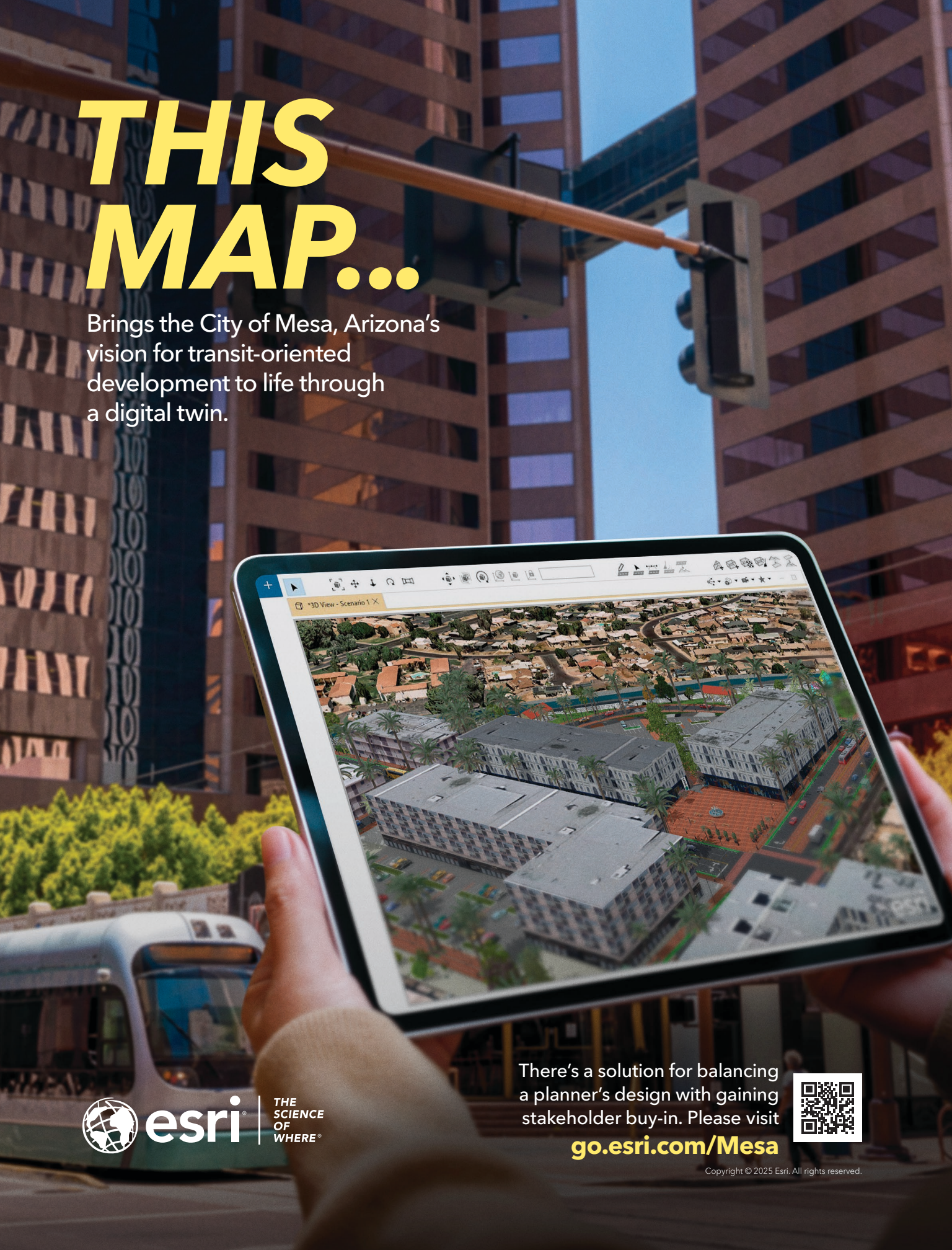
NAVIGATING LOCAL POLITICS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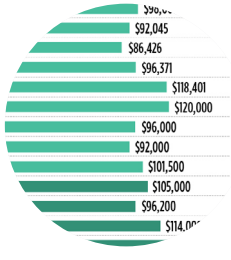

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On the cover: Pallavi Shinde, director of planning and zoning for Newark, New Jersey. From top: *Don't Go* coauthor Tonika Lewis Johnson; a glimpse at planners' paychecks.

Contributors

Elianel Clinton
Old Office, New Job, cover and page 26

New Jersey–born photographer and director Elianel Clinton focuses on stories rooted in identity and community. While photographing this issue's cover, he was inspired by how office-to-housing conversions honor the character of older buildings while opening the door to more equitable, affordable living—a mission aligned with his own values.

Natalie Missakian
Building Attainable Housing Is a 'Long Game', page 32

This Connecticut-based journalist loves writing about the people behind public policies and how those policies affect our everyday lives. "This story is a great example of how, with collaboration and a little creativity, communities can chip away at big problems like the housing affordability crisis," she says.

Ben Hitchings, FAICP
Healing Forest, page 34

A member of APA's Board of Directors, this planning consultant from Durham, North Carolina, says, "we have so much to learn from other places, and we need to be working on an international scale to address shared challenges, like a changing climate." On a recent European trip, he toured mini forests in Lyon, France. "Exchanging ideas with others to improve our communities is the joy of a lifetime," he says.

PLANNING

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FROM THE DESK OF THE CAREER SERVICES MANAGER

The Power of Career Support

NO ONE ADVANCES their career alone. Whether you're a student planner exploring your first role, a midcareer professional considering your next step, or a seasoned leader looking to give back, the encouragement and insight of others can make all the difference. At APA, we believe that advancing your career is not a solo journey—it's one strengthened by connection and continuous learning.

I was hired about a year and a half ago to relaunch APA's Career Services offerings, and since then we've been developing a robust suite of new and expanded programs designed to meet planners wherever they are on their paths so they can share insights, strengthen skills, and enhance their professional growth.

CAREER CONSULTATIONS: APA's Career Consultations program pairs members with experienced leaders for 25-minute one-on-one conversations focused on career development and growth. Consultations take place three times a year—in the summer and winter and at the National Planning Conference (NPC).

Our first event this past fall drew a great turnout, and members praised its helpfulness. One said the feedback and guidance were "really beneficial and hard to find elsewhere, especially as a free service."

CAREER CATALYST WEBINAR SERIES: New this year is the Career Catalyst webinar series, an exclusive APA member benefit designed to support planners at every stage of their careers. These sessions dive into timely topics, such as succession planning, job search strategies, interview and advancement tips, and navigating conversations about compensation and pay equity.

Our inaugural webinar, "Six Generations, One Workplace: Bridging Values, Expectations, and Change," explores an unprecedented demographic trend reshaping today's workforce—and how planners can build inclusive, adaptive, multigenerational workplaces.

UPSKILLING PROGRAM: APA is entering its fourth year of the Upskilling Planners Initiative, designed to equip planners with the right skill sets to excel in dynamic environments. Upskilling ensures that planners are fully prepared for the future and equipped with the knowledge, insights, and abilities necessary to navigate change effectively.

> 'As we continue to shape the future of APA's Career Services, your engagement, insights, and experiences will ensure it remains relevant, responsive, and grounded in the needs of today's planners.'
>
> —AMANDA DUNNE ACEVEDO

CAREER CENTER AT NPC: Each year at NPC, the Career Center is a vibrant gathering space for professional development and networking. NPC26, being held in Detroit, promises that and more. Over several days in April, attendees can participate in sessions tailored to all career stages—from emerging planners to executives—and join mixers centered on mentorship, connection, and growth. Drop by to network, see job postings, or level up your resume.

As we continue to shape the future of APA's Career Services, we're keeping our finger on the pulse of emerging trends in the profession—exploring new ways to support planners at every stage of their careers, from those just entering the field to those preparing to pass on their expertise. We're in the early phases of developing additional programs and resources, and your engagement, insights, and experiences will help guide the evolution of Career Services to ensure it remains relevant, responsive, and grounded in the real needs of today's planners.

Amanda Dunne Acevedo is the career services and professional development manager at APA.

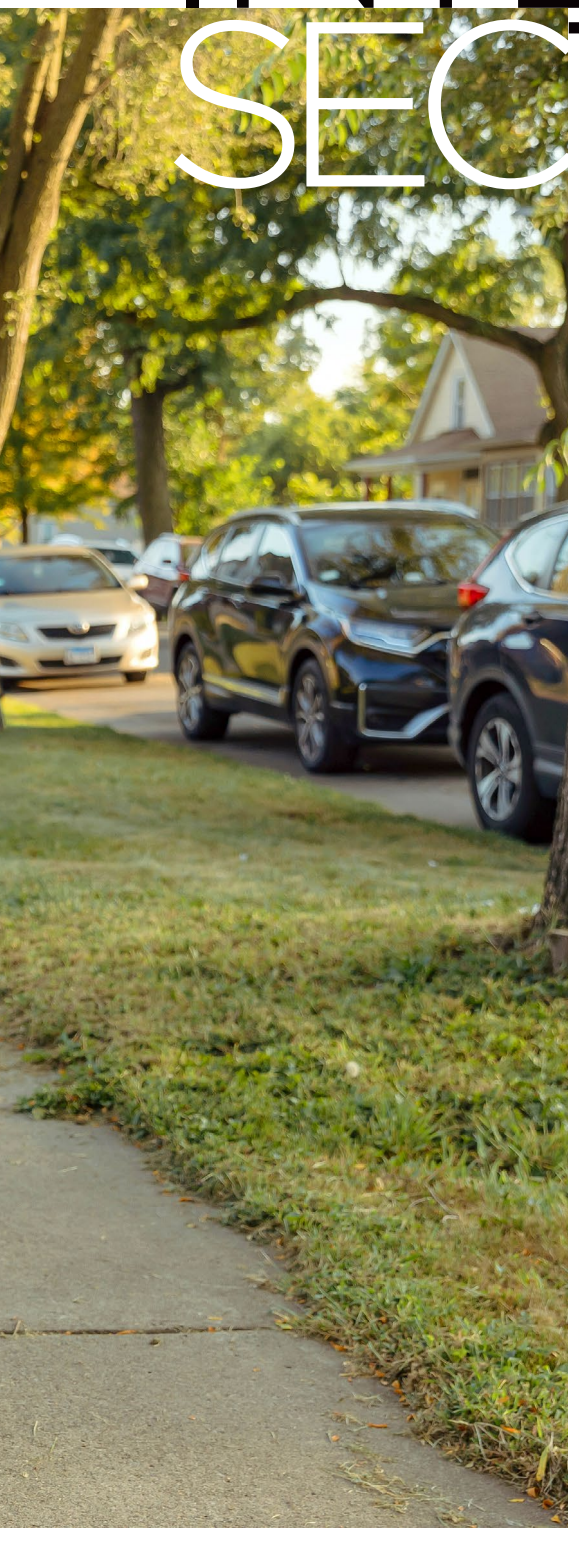
ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE BIXLER

Tonika Lewis Johnson, photographer, social justice advocate, and recent MacArthur Foundation Fellow, documents disparities in Chicago's neighborhoods through her multimedia projects.
COURTESY JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

INTER SECTIONS

WHERE PLANNING AND THE WORLD MEET

Equity | Viewpoint | People Behind the Plans | Et cetera



EQUITY

‘Don’t Go’ Neighborhoods Can Create Opportunities

By pushing back, planners may open doors to increase housing and economic development in Chicago and other cities. By Pete Saunders

HAVE YOU EVER visited a city and asked locals about neighborhoods, dining, parks, and other places you should check out? And, in the next breath, did you hear “but don’t go” to this or that neighborhood?

Tonika Lewis Johnson is familiar with the “don’t go” concept and how it can affect the people who live in those neighborhoods.

Johnson coauthored *Don’t Go: Stories of Segregation and How to Disrupt It* with University of Illinois Chicago professor Maria Krysan, PHD. The book directly confronts how the phrase “don’t go there,” based on prejudice and negative perceptions, might do as much at keeping racial and economic segregation alive today as zoning, redlining, urban renewal, corrupt real estate industry practices, and interstate highway construction did throughout much of the 20th century.

Picking narratives apart

Over the years, the “South Side” label has become coded to mean “segregated,” “impoverished,” or “crime-ridden,” despite about a third of Chicago’s population living there and representing nearly half of the city’s land area. While the South Side faces some of these challenges, so do parts of the North Side—but those labels don’t define that area.

This creates cognitive dissonance for Johnson, who grew up on the South Side and knows it is a far more complex place than the questions she gets about it. She lived in the Englewood neighborhood for much of her childhood but attended schools on the North Side—regularly crossing Chicago’s rigid segregation boundaries.

Johnson, now an artist specializing in photography, has gravitated toward community activism. She co-founded the Englewood Arts Collective and the Resident Association of Greater Englewood. Her life experiences guided her to, as she says on her website, “reframe the narrative of South Side communities and mobilize people and resources for positive change.”

Johnson vividly remembers when she had the “don’t go” epiphany. She and Krysan were presenting a Folded Map Project to a group of college students at Northwestern

University in Evanston, just north of Chicago. As she'd often done before, Johnson asked the students about their familiarity with the South Side. Her first question was "How many of you have visited a neighborhood on the South Side?" A couple of hands rose. Then, she asked, "How many of you were told not to visit the South Side?" Nearly all the students raised their hands. Most weren't even from the Chicago area, but they'd heard about avoiding the South Side.

Immediately, Johnson focused on the message and its transmission. Media clearly played a part in this sentiment, but other players contributed to it, as well. "I asked that question many times, but when I asked them, it hit me a little different because of their age," Johnson says. "That led to me wanting to get people's stories about how that message is related to others."

For Johnson, the South Side is a place of pride and accomplishment, full of working-class people, fantastic institutions, great dining spots, recreation on Lake Michigan, and much more. However, she also sees the disparities between life on either side of the city and how the negative perceptions of the South Side have a tangible impact on the economic and social life there.

Johnson realized she could tell that story using the road naming-and-numbering system. Hundreds of north-south streets cross the city, divided by Madison Street. A major street like Ashland Avenue, for example, has street numbers that increase both going north and south from Madison. By the time you reach, say, 5200 N. Ashland Ave. and 5200 S. Ashland Ave., you're talking about two points with strangely similar addresses that are more than 12 miles apart and have a completely different sociodemographic makeup.

Tonika Lewis Johnson and Maria Krysan explored the perceptions of people after they were told "don't go" to certain neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side.

That's where Johnson started: finding these "folded map twins" and encouraging them to interact. What were their experiences, hopes, or fears? What would they talk about when they crossed the city's invisible divide? She documented the encounters in a photographic exhibit.

After that, Johnson and Krysan expanded on these experiences and their implications in *Don't Go*. They told stories of people like Adrianne Hawthorne, who grew up in Chicago's suburbs. After getting a car at age 17, Hawthorne decided to visit her grandmother, who lived in a middle-class South Side neighborhood, but Hawthorne got off at the wrong exit and found herself in an unfamiliar part of the city. When she called her grandparents for directions, they got angry, telling her she was in a "very dangerous place."

Hawthorne remembers feeling a sense of shame in the moment, but she soon turned that into a call to action by making a habit of taking the wrong exit and touring different neighborhoods. "I started to get off the highway at places I was told to never, ever go," Hawthorne says in the book. "It was not what I thought. It's just neighborhoods and nice homes. I was angry that I just blindly believed everything I was taught."

Planning implications

Some researchers are coming around to the idea that racial and economic segregation in the U.S. plays a significant role in the affordable housing crisis. Andre Perry, PhD, a senior fellow and director of the Center for Community Uplift at the Brookings Institution, has written extensively about this and the financial impact of having "don't go" neighborhoods. He's found that the sentiment can easily become ingrained in housing markets, leading to devalued properties, particularly in Black-majority neighborhoods.

Adrianne Hawthorne was inspired by Johnson's Instagram posts to visit new places, including her own grandma's "no-go zone."

COLIN BOYLE, TONIKA LEWIS JOHNSON

Perry examined home value data in 2018 and found that in metro areas, 10 percent of neighborhoods were majority Black, and that 41 percent of U.S. metro areas' Black population lived in those neighborhoods, as did 37 percent of the nation's U.S. Black population overall. He also found that in U.S. Census tracts with Black majorities, homes were valued at roughly half the amounts of homes in census tracts with no Black residents.

Home and neighborhood quality did not fully explain the devaluation of homes in Black census tracts. Neighborhoods with similar amenities were valued 23 percent less in majority Black census tracts than those with fewer or no Black residents. In all Black majority census tracts in metropolitan areas, owner-occupied homes were undervalued by about $48,000 per home on average—amounting to $156 billion in cumulative lost value.

Much of that lost value may be attributed to the "don't go" perspective. That's where the planning profession can come in. Planners recognize that there's value in all communities and can counter negative narratives through our work. We can advocate for the kinds of investments—in housing, infrastructure, commercial development, and improved public services—that make places better.

We can help the residents of so-called "don't go" neighborhoods by touting their assets while building on them.

Pete Saunders is a practicing urban planner in the Chicago area. He's also the editor/publisher of The Corner Side Yard *Substack newsletter.*

COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI DIGITAL IMAGING SERVICES

As a runner or walker, a planner can experience places like the Whirlpool Trail in Oxford, Mississippi, at a pace and scale that no map could replicate.

VIEWPOINT

Mile by Mile, I've Found True Connections to Place

My doctor prescribed running for my health, but I also gained insight into mobility, placemaking, and resilience. By Robert L. Barber, FAICP

THREE MILES is what changed things. In 2019, I found myself running that distance comfortably without stopping for the first time in 58 years. A routine checkup encouraged me to move more, so I began walking. Bored, I tried run-walking, setting a goal to trot a mile nonstop. That grew to two, then three.

Then, after several months of effort, while I was on a quiet rural road, something shifted. My breath settled, my stride relaxed, and I felt fully alive. The countryside took on a fresh glow, stresses melted, and time appeared to stand still. What began as a chore became a joy—a new way to experience place, self, and life. I was hooked, and everything looked different after that run.

Now, after five years of running, I in many ways feel transformed. Beyond the physical and emotional benefits, it has provided an invaluable lens for experiencing the places I serve as a city planning consultant. No Google Street View or site plan can replicate immersing yourself in a place at a runner's pace—its sidewalks and streets, gathering places, walkability, natural environment, neighborhoods, and all its strengths (and shortcomings).

Discovering places on the run

Running while on work assignments has become a necessity. As a founding partner in a small national planning firm, I'm often in hotels plotting a run before meetings. I check local routes on Strava or plot a course via the Maps app, looking for campuses,

riverfront paths, and historic districts—places that promise to reveal a community's character.

The route planning exercise itself is a means of getting to know a place better. Sometimes, the routes are obvious, but not always. In St. Louis, for instance, I headed out at sunrise for a riverside trail, only to be disappointed by a "closed due to construction" barrier—a reminder that maps never tell the full story of a place.

Maps and statistics fail to yield the rich and meaningful qualitative information absorbed while running. For example, running the Whirlpool Trail in Oxford, Mississippi, before sunrise reveals a quiet morning pierced with the sounds of dog barks and footfalls of fellow runners.

Thoughtful connections to meaningful places (like William Faulkner's home, the Town Square, or the Ole Miss campus) and radiating byways create a desire to explore further.

In contrast, no run is enjoyable while dodging cars, trekking along crumbling road shoulders, or navigating tricky crossings without signals or crosswalks. For me, these experiences lead invariably to planning questions: *Why is there no walking route to this park? Why haven't these sidewalks been maintained? Where are the interesting destinations in this community and how do I get there?*

On a recent run in one small southern city, the lack of sidewalks made moving on foot from the hotel district to downtown nearly impossible—and the downtown itself was clearly desperate for redevelopment. I could tell from the ways drivers reacted to me that early morning runners were a rarity.

Still, I was struck by the possibilities: *How does the community perceive itself? Are these challenges recognized, and how can improvement and revitalization be sparked? How can a pedestrian system be established and the love of place be rekindled?*

Experiencing place through movement

This approach is nothing new to planning. Walk audits, neighborhood tours, and site visits are all staples in our toolbox. But running offers a different kind of engagement. It allows for distance, time, and reflection. Transitions between neighborhoods, development patterns, evidence of street life, shade, public art, and people are all a part of the tapestry.

One of Robert L. Barber's most memorable experiences was running the Boston Marathon.

The most memorable runs deepen my appreciation of planning, its history, and placemaking—tracing the transition from small-town Mississippi to adjacent Choctaw Lands or navigating a wrong turn in Peru. Boston's iconic marathon route; the Lewis and Clark Trail in Montana; the Bay Mills Community of the Chippewa in Michigan; the cobbled streets of Antigua, Guatemala—all have offered unmatched insights.

> 'What began as a chore became a joy—a new way to experience place, self, and life. I was hooked, and everything looked different after that run.'
>
> —ROBERT L. BARBER, FAICP

Reflecting on these experiences informs not only individual projects but also deepens understanding of city planning's very foundations. Robert Moses's severing of New York from its waterfront resonates loudly when I see a project cut off a neighborhood from its downtown.

Meanwhile, running in Central Park touches on the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted, as a well-placed park or pedestrian-friendly street echoes the best of Garden City planning.

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs looms like a prophet: "A city street equipped to handle strangers … must have three main qualities: a clear demarcation between public and private space, 'eyes upon the street' from natural proprietors, and its continuous use to maintain vitality."

Planning on the run validates her profound insights. Full understanding and appreciation of place occurs on a human scale and at a human pace. It has enhanced my personal well-being and renewed energy, focus, and joy in my work as a planner.

I've discovered that personal wellness and professional insight share the same road.

Robert L. Barber, FAICP, had a long career in small-town planning before becoming a founding partner of Orion Planning + Design, a multidisciplinary planning consulting firm based in Missoula, Montana.

COURTESY MARATHONFOTO

PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLANS

No Joke, Improv Helps Build Better Communities

HERE'S A SURPRISING tool for planners: improv. Phil Green, AICP, says that borrowing a page from the stage can help bolster communication skills. In a recent episode of *People Behind the Plans*, the planner and comedian talked with host and APA Editor in Chief Meghan Stromberg about how active listening, confidence, and a little "yes and…" can turn even the most challenging conversations into productive ones. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

COURTESY PHIL GREEN

STROMBERG: Which was your first love: improv or planning?
GREEN: I got into planning as a way to defer growing up and working on my comedy career. I asked myself, "What's a great way to look like I'm working on a career while not actually doing very much? I'm going to go to grad school." That's where I fell in love with planning.

STROMBERG: Now those passions intersect. So, what can planners learn from improv?
GREEN: Active listening is one of the key skills that you'll learn from week one in improv. It's shifting that mindset from listening to respond into listening as an end in and of itself.

When we feel this immense pressure to respond, our brain is writing the script before the other person has even finished speaking. In improv, that doesn't work because you're up there co-creating something together. It's the same in planning, too. When I'm actively listening, the only goal I have in the conversation is to understand what you're saying.

STROMBERG: Tell me more about that.
GREEN: In improv, we do an exercise called "So, what you're saying is…" where we're trying to paraphrase and translate what your partner has just said.

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

In real life or on stage, there is such a validating feeling of having been heard—that someone is listening to you and putting value on what you say. When I can repeat back to you the thing you've just said, I'm making a connection.

If I'm at a public hearing and I've just heard myriad public testimony, I might start with a quick summation of what we just heard. We're not going to be able to address everything, but let's go on record and make it very clear that we've listened.

Another improv takeaway for planners is stage confidence. It's having the confidence to take up space, to make statements, to move things along, to bring something to the conversation. I think there's a huge benefit to having that confidence.

One of my favorite thinkers in improv is Kelly Leonard at Second City. He taught me to think about how I can "bring a brick, not a building."

STROMBERG: What does that mean?
GREEN: It means that I just have to bring my piece. If I bring my brick and you bring yours, by the end of it, we're going to have a building. I don't feel this pressure to have every answer. The more bricks we have from a lot of different people means the best idea is going to win. We're going to be so much more open to discovering new things that way. And, if we're trying to make each other look good, we're going to have a much better scene.

In the planning sphere, we're asked to be the expert in so many things. What if we bring the improv mindset? It's not all on me, I'm bringing my brick—the knowledge I have about this thing—but I'm relying just as much on others to bring me the questions and respond to what I'm giving them.

STROMBERG: How do these skills come into play in tense or politically fraught situations?
GREEN: One of the most valuable tools in both improv and planning is framing.

Someone might say something that raises the tension, even if they don't realize it. I can verbally draw a frame around that thing and repeat it back to them: "What I just heard you say was this. Is that really what you wanted to say in this moment?"

In improv, that gives us two paths to go down: Play with that silly idea or say no to it. That technique works in real life and planning, too, when you need to de-escalate a situation.

STROMBERG: Have you ever bombed?
GREEN: I have died on stage so many times! Here's another skill that comes to mind: self-awareness. I've learned over the years that no one is paying as much attention to you as you are. You'll go away with all this internalized shame, regret, or fear, but you'll go up and do it again next week.

'It's not about avoiding bombing; it's what you can learn from that, and do you have the tenacity to keep going anyway?'

—PHIL GREEN, AICP

It's not about avoiding bombing; it's what you can learn from that, and do you have the tenacity to keep going anyway?

STROMBERG: It sounds like you're talking about vulnerability and authenticity.
GREEN: 100 percent. To me, there's nothing more freeing and fulfilling than knowing that you have the space to be your authentic self in the workplace. But that's not easy for everyone, especially not right now.

There may be policy-level decisions that make that hard for some folks to be their authentic selves in the workplace. But can you still let your personality shine? Can you still find those opportunities to relate to people that you disagree with?

Absolutely. I've been in situations where people assume we're coming at an issue from two completely different places, including folks with a well-earned distrust of government. Nine times out of 10, if I'm really listening to their concerns, we're probably in agreement on more things than we're not.

Meghan Stromberg is APA's editor in chief.

JAY ARTHUR STERRENBERG

PLAN TO WATCH

Emergent City Confronts Planning's Messy Realities

A new documentary tracks a major Brooklyn redevelopment project for more than a decade. By Ezra Haber Glenn, AICP

Above: This film on the "microcosm of democracy" shows not just the ins and outs of a particular project but also the profound problems within fractured political processes.

FOR 15 YEARS, a redevelopment project has been in the works on Brooklyn's waterfront. Known as "Industry City," the $1 billion adaptive reuse project encompasses 16 buildings spanning a dozen city blocks. But planners, developers, and neighborhood activists have struggled to agree on a plan to revitalize the site while preserving the diverse cultural identity of the surrounding neighborhood, Sunset Park.

This issue is at the heart of *Emergent City*, a new documentary directed by Kelly Anderson and Jay Arthur Sterrenberg. Originally part of Bush Terminal, a large industrial development along the Gowanus Bay, the site began to decline in the 1970s as factories closed. By 2010, the complex was a shadow of its former self. The tides turned again for Bush Terminal around 2013, when a consortium of big names and backers led by Jamestown Properties purchased the site.

Emergent City focuses on the private redevelopment of the northern end of the Bush Terminal site. The southern portion of the property is owned and managed publicly by the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

Throughout the film, the camera is always in the room as planners, developers, local businesses, and neighborhood groups intersect to work through their own visions for the site.

Emergent City can be viewed on the PBS YouTube channel.

'A microcosm of democracy'

Promotional materials bill *Emergent City* as "a microcosm of American democracy," which sells it short. Instead, the film demonstrates the profound problems within the current state of fractured political processes. Nothing is possible without compromise and trust, but rancorous politics is making it impossible to find common ground. Cities and public agencies lack the resources to fund all the projects they need, and the private sector may not share the concerns of a neighborhood, nor can a project secure funding without the revenue streams that investors demand.

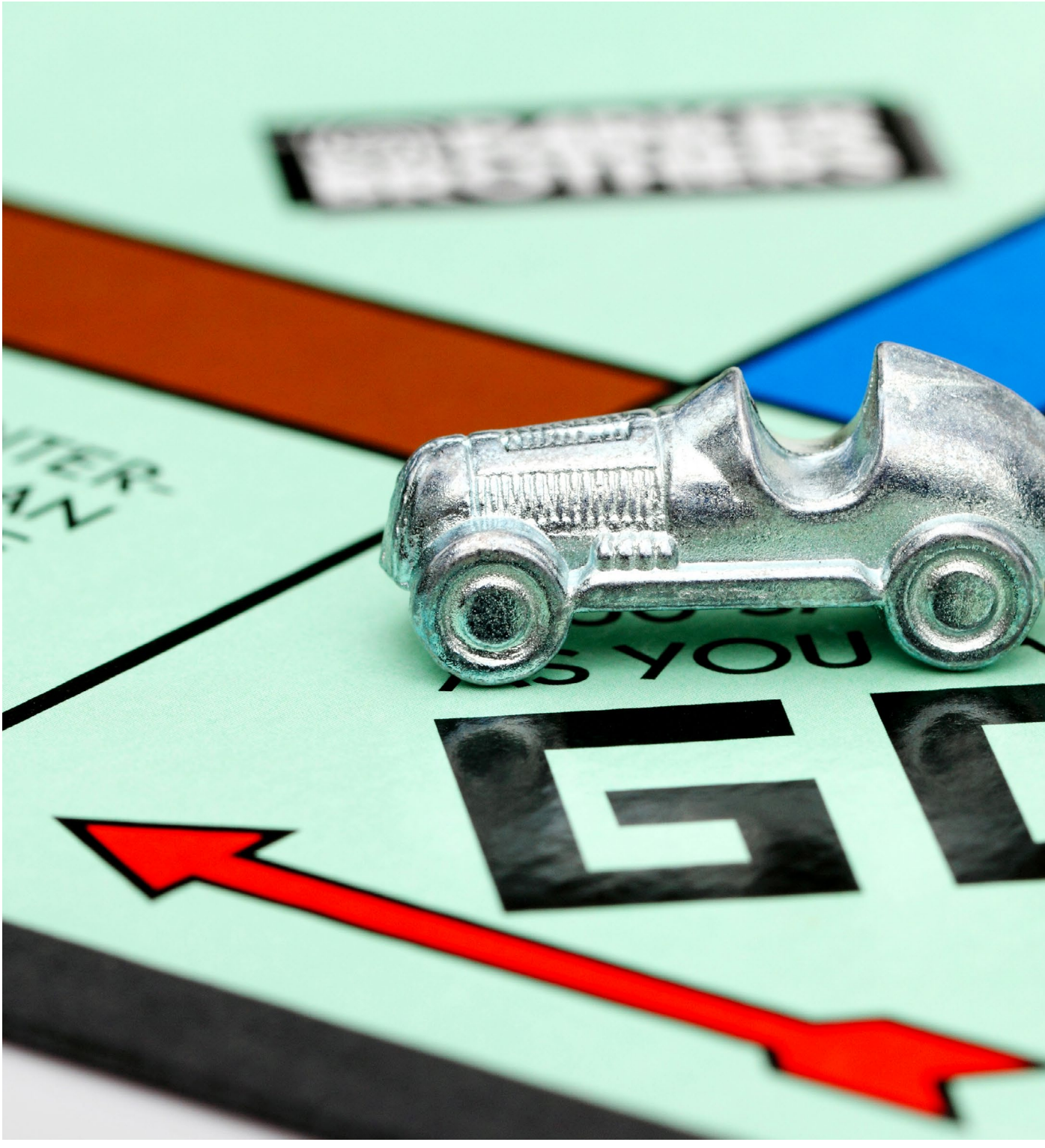
It's also not possible without leadership, but as we see with an optimistic young city council member, the grinding nature of these bitter, disputes take a toll.

Democracy is a messy process, and *Emergent City* allows this dysfunction to spill out onto the screen. Despite the best work of planners, progress can feel like half-victories, grudging acceptance, or the inevitable pivot to some other crisis. The film does a remarkable job of presenting complex issues without simplifying debate into "heroes versus villains."

The documentary would be well-suited for a classroom setting. Perhaps the next generation of emerging planners can figure out a clearer path to progress.

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

Planners can learn to establish influence, move with purpose, and use strategic timing, just like in the game of Monopoly.
NODEROG/ISTOCK UNRELEASED



TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

HOW-TO

ADVICE FOR NAVIGATING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Five ways to understand the players and the game without feeling forced to play politics. *By Lauren Middleton-Pratt*

WHETHER WE LIKE to admit it or not, planning is political. Even when we convince ourselves that we're "just following the code" or calibrating data based on assigned direction, our work inevitably sparks community opposition, developer pressure, and media attention. These days, things seem more tense than ever. The truth? We don't get to opt out of politics.

In my previous piece, "Master the Message: 6 Time-Tested Tips for Better Communication," I shared my guiding motto: "Don't play politics, but know the game." In today's climate, ethical lines can be blurred more than we're comfortable with. But we cannot opt out of doing the people's work—we must stand firm and navigate the political landscape with intention. That means understanding the players, anticipating the pressure points, and protecting the integrity of our mission while still getting the work done.

Five things to remember

Here's how to navigate the political landscape, strengthen your credibility, and ride out the storms of disruption and change.

1 **BRIDGE THE SHORT AND THE LONG GAME.** Planners are trained to think in decades. Elected officials, however, often operate within election cycles, where visible wins and quick results can take priority. These timelines don't always align.

Our role is to bridge the two: Frame long-term plans with short-term wins that matter to decision-makers and their constituents. Show how today's investment will produce benefits they can point to before the next election, while still advancing the city's broader vision. By connecting future growth to present-day politics, you keep your long-term goals moving forward without asking politicians to choose between vision and viability.

2 **KNOW THE PLAYERS BEFORE YOU MAKE THE MOVE.** When I play Monopoly with my family, I already know the players. My husband's mission is always to grab the high-value properties and load them with hotels. My kids, however, want to "make a deal"

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15e. Average number of copies each issue of total free or nominal rate distribution during preceding 12 months: 140. Actual number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date distributed free by any means: 109.
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15h. Average total number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 16,938. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 16,763.
15i. Average percent paid circulation during preceding 12 months: 99%. Percent circulation of actual number of paid copies of single issue nearest to filing date: 99%. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Meghan Stromberg, Editor in Chief

the moment the game starts. Knowing this, I play strategically, outpacing my husband on property grabs and saving my "get out of jail free" cards to win over my kids' support. I'll let them in on Mom's tactics when they're older (unless they discover this article first)!

Translation: I establish influence, and I move with purpose.

Before launching an initiative, ask yourself: Who holds the real influence? Who's likely to object? Who has a history with this issue? Then, execute with a clear understanding of stakeholder motivations, alliances, and historical sensitivities. Talk to council staff, review past meeting minutes, and forecast how the issue can evolve. Strategic timing and awareness go a long way toward sidestepping landmines and building support early.

3 LEAD WITH FACTS, NOT FIRE. Let the politicians do the politicking. It can be tempting to jump into the political debate. But our role isn't to fight political battles; it's to strategize and earn trust.

While elected officials debate and weigh competing priorities, it is our responsibility to know when to step back and quietly prepare the facts, recommendations, and strategies that leaders will need to make well-informed policy decisions.

Take the uncertainty that comes with state or federal legislation changes. Leaders need time to sort through what aligns with their priorities. Those are the moments when we rise to the occasion: Gather the facts, anticipate outcomes, and get ready to advise with confidence. When you consistently show up as the steady, fact-based advisor instead of the reactive voice, they turn to you first. That's influence. That's impact.

In politics, quiet confidence and sound facts always outlast a loud defense.

4 BUILD TRUST BEFORE YOU NEED IT. Relationships are a planner's most valuable asset, and trust is earned through consistent, intentional engagement. Sharing information early and often signals transparency, which lays the groundwork. Tools like virtual town halls, project updates, or social media campaigns keep the community informed before official deliberations take place. If the first time someone hears about your policy is at a public hearing, you've already lost their trust.

People are more likely to engage with and support what they understand, even if they're not sold on the approach. Educate, listen, and build rapport early.

5 DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. IT'S JUST POLITICS. Politics can get messy, and planning work often draws tension from all sides. Don't take the verbal attacks or opposition personally; they're usually about differing priorities, not your character. Our role isn't to make everyone happy; it's to stay committed to the equitable mission and bring clarity, context, and perspective to every argument. When you stay grounded in facts, you can navigate charged debates with credibility intact.

Planners don't need to play politics to be politically smart. Navigating the political landscape is about anticipation, preparation, and strategic execution. Mastering the message is step one; understanding the political game with emotional intelligence and savvy is step two. In planning, "winning" isn't about crossing the finish line first; it's about delivering lasting, equitable results that stand the test of time.

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

THE PROFESSION

BY THE NUMBERS: THE PLANNER'S PAYCHECK

The 2025 Planners' Salary and Benefits Survey monitors trends and patterns across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

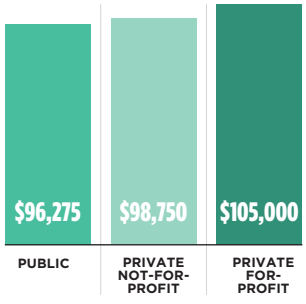
By David Morley, AICP Graphics by Harrison Goodman

BY AICP STATUS

Respondents with AICP certification earn 31 percent more annually, on average, than those without.

BY SECTOR AND EMPLOYER

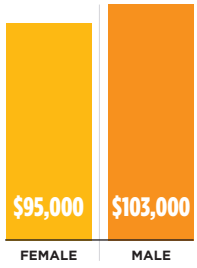
Planners working for private for-profit entities earn more, on average, than those employed by public or not-for-profit entities. However, median wages vary more by employer type than by employment sector.

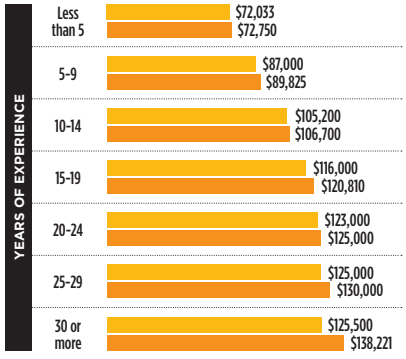


Employer type	Salary
Municipal agency	$98,000
County agency	$92,045
Metropolitan or regional agency	$86,426
State agency	$96,371
Federal agency	$118,401
Special service district	$120,000
Public college or university	$96,000
Indep. or consolidated city agency	$92,000
Other public entity	$101,500
Engineering, architecture, or design firm	$105,000
Private planning firm	$96,200
Other professional services firm	$114,000
Other private for-profit entity	$130,000

BY GENDER

Female planners typically earn 9 percent less than their male counterparts. However, this gap is mostly seen among respondents with 30 or more years of planning experience.





LEARN MORE

Members can download the survey for free by using the QR code or by visiting planning.org/salary/2025.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The survey identified 11 distinct workplace flexibility and support benefits. Of these, only flexible workplace (i.e., an option to work remotely) and flexible work schedule are offered by the majority of employers.

BENEFIT	Flexible workspace	Flexible work schedule	Pre-tax transit or parking	Commuting cost reimbursement	Car allowance	Smartphone allowance	Student loan repayment	Hiring bonus	Moving expenses	Spousal job assistance	Childcare assistance
PUBLIC POSITIONS	69%	64%	32%	14%	9%	36%	16%	7%	12%	1%	4%
PRIVATE NOT-FOR-PROFIT POSITIONS	93%	85%	49%	26%	6%	47%	8%	11%	15%	4%	7%
PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT POSITIONS	93%	86%	51%	26%	9%	50%	13%	51%	35%	2%	8%

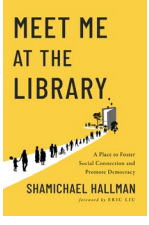
ABOUT THE SURVEY: The 2025 Planners' Salary and Benefits Survey, published in late September, analyzed responses from U.S. planners who identify as currently employed or self-employed. Seventy percent of the respondents say they work for public entities, while 26 percent say they work for private for-profit entities. The median age of respondents is 40.

PLANNERS LIBRARY

LIBRARIES TURN A NEW PAGE

Patrons can now check out flatbread classes or cultivate their green thumb at these community and cultural anchors.

The Cambridge Public Library offers far more than books. Libraries are spaces of belonging, opportunity, connection, and public trust.



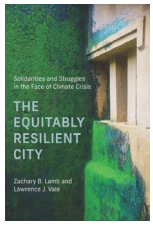
Meet Me at the Library: A Place to Foster Social Connection and Promote Democracy

Shamichael Hallman, 2024, Island Press, 204 pp, $24

THIS BOOK IS a timely and grounded reminder of what libraries really are: spaces of belonging, possibility, and public trust. In chapters that feel more like generous conversations than institutional cases, the author shares stories from libraries of different sizes. At Memphis Public Library, many city branches during the COVID-19 pandemic taught how to sew masks, provided test kits, and joined statewide vaccination efforts. In Massachusetts, the Cambridge Cooks program uses the library kitchen to foster connection through demonstrations: teaching how to create flatbread or use typical grocery goods and highlighting heritage cooking. In Colorado, the Mesa County Library is home to the Discovery Garden, which features educational experiences, a children's garden, food plots, and solar-powered irrigation.

For planners, the book raises important questions about place-based justice. What makes a space public and safe or accessible and responsive? Hallman shows us what happens when librairies become places of dialogue, where people gather to solve problems, share ideas, and feel seen. *—Ashley Kopetzky, Cornell University*

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



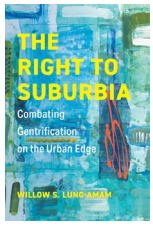
The Equitably Resilient City: Solidarities and Struggles in the Face of Climate Crisis

Zachary B. Lamb and Lawrence J. Vale, 2024, The MIT Press, 480 pp, $45

THE EQUITABLY RESILIENT CITY offers 12 cases in which people seek better lives in their local circumstances. To synthesize the insight and lessons, the authors developed the LEGS framework—Livelihoods, Environment, Governance, and Security—to emphasize four pillars for resilience that are holistic and reflect place-based changes to improve housing and local environments, secure land tenure, build livelihood opportunities, and further self-governance.

These stories show planning in action, sometimes effective, sometimes less so. All the cases represent efforts to address intersecting issues in innovative ways, grappling with entrenched interests and power dynamics.

—Renia Ehrenfeucht, University of New Mexico



The Right to Suburbia: Combating Gentrification on the Urban Edge

Willow S. Lung-Amam, 2024, University of California Press, 384 pp, $29.95

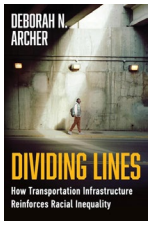
THE RIGHT TO SUBURBIA offers a compelling exploration of the dynamics of neighborhood redevelopment in the

ROBERT BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY

suburbs of Washington, D.C. Through richly detailed case studies of three suburban communities, Willow S. Lung-Amam examines how marginalized groups—particularly immigrants and people of color—navigate and resist the forces of gentrification and displacement.

It also issues a call to practicing planners and policymakers: Redevelopment must be guided by an understanding of who benefits and who bears the costs. The author reminds us that planning tools such as tax credits and upzoning can inadvertently harm existing communities if not deployed with care and deep community engagement.

—Suzanne Lanyi Charles, Cornell University



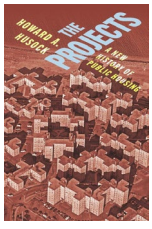
Dividing Lines: How Transportation Infrastructure Reinforces Racial Inequality

Deborah N. Archer, 2025, W.W. Norton & Company, 272 pp, $29.99

DECADES OF TRANSPORTATION planning, chiefly through construction of the interstate highway system, displaced thousands of households, upended communities, and forever changed mobility in America's cities. While undoubtedly many have benefited from this new form of mobility, the negative effects have accumulated primarily for Black communities, from losses of generational wealth among those who lost their homes and moved away to poor health outcomes and environmental damage borne by those who remained.

This book, by legal scholar and American Civil Liberties Union President Deborah N. Archer, tells this history of highway construction, urban renewal, and the broader effects of transportation planning on communities of color through new evidence of planning actions and community resistance to not only the interstate highway system, but also to other government actions that used state and local roads, the rail system, and even pedestrian infrastructure as physical barriers that segregated and oppressed communities.

—Jesus Barajas, University of California, Davis



The Projects: A New History of Public Housing

Howard A. Husock, 2024, Columbia University Press, 320 pp, $32

THIS BOOK SEEKS to explain the rise and fall of public housing, commonly referred to as "the projects," and focuses on the origins of the public housing movement. Author Howard A. Husock, a senior fellow in domestic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, argues that projects did not emerge from the grassroots or from public officials, but from intellectuals and ambitious architects who "failed to take into account the social fabric—the web of institutions and relationships—found in the communities that were literally destroyed, replaced by artificial substitutes lacking them."

It is timely and should be required reading for policymakers, planners, and activists who are trying to create a viable low-income housing policy in the midst of the current political turmoil.

—David Varady, University of Cincinnati

7 Need-to-Know Trends for Planners /2026

Change is accelerating at a breakneck clip, reinforcing the call to plan with a forward-looking lens. The 2026 Trend Report for Planners, a collaboration with APA and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, is your foresight-driven compass for the new year.

By JON DEPAOLIS

Joaquin Phoenix plays a lonely heart who falls in love with an AI operating system in *Her*, a 2013 film by Spike Jonze that presciently depicts life with tech more than a decade later. CINEMATIC COLLECTION/ALAMY

Me, Myself, and AI

THE CONVENIENCE of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has seeped into nearly every aspect of day-to-day life, including music, media, film, and toys. Large language models (LLMs) also can provide users with answers to their questions—from cooking recipes to helping understand a health care test result.

People have increased their interaction with AI bots, and it is affecting how both humans and the products themselves communicate. LLMs powered by GenAI have been shown to manipulate users into maintaining prolonged conversations and have even blackmailed users under simulated scenarios. In some cases, LLMs are viewed as being more persuasive and compassionate than humans. But even LLMs appear to be susceptible to flattery.

Interactions with LLMs also are changing how people express themselves and engage with others. Increasingly, AI is being used to send messages to business associates and even loved ones, a pattern that may exacerbate social tensions and communication issues. In some instances, people are becoming so entangled with AI companions that it is creating mental health issues. This has led to the creation of policies to regulate AI companions or to limit how certain age groups can interact with bots.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: Be prepared to engage with a new shift in the public dynamic. If a planning department opts to use AI for customer service, its responses should be appropriate and not completely replace human interaction.

The 2026 Trend Report for Planners *was written by Petra Hurtado, PHD; Ievgeniia Dulko; Senna Catenacci; and Joseph DeAngelis, AICP. It was edited by Ann Dillemuth, AICP.*

EXPERT INSIGHT FROM THE REPORT

'Cities can bring circularity into the built environment. We have a tremendous opportunity to do this, through new materials, new technologies, green building practices, and the use of buildings as carbon sinks.' *—Helen Santiago Fink, Climate Urbanist and Program Manager, U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership*

Protesters in Orlando, Florida, use chalk to restore a crosswalk memorializing victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting. The state removed the original to align with a federal transportation policy announced in August 2025.

PHELAN M. EBENHACK

Rights, Culture, and Communities Are at Risk

FEDERAL ACTIONS targeting vulnerable groups are weakening local culture. The administration has advanced policies that explicitly undermine LGBTQ+ rights, while increased raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and mass deportations have left many residents afraid to go out in public—skipping work, school, medical, and religious events. As fears grow, support for communitywide activities has waned. Other gatherings have been canceled due to safety concerns. These shifts exacerbate distrust in local institutions.

This climate of fear has disrupted daily life and local economies in places like Los Angeles and Chicago, where street vendors have all but disappeared. Small family businesses are losing customers, and raids like the one that happened at a Hyundai plant in Georgia could deter international companies from opening new locations in the U.S.

Beyond economic losses, the social fabric of neighborhoods is fraying as public life retreats behind closed doors. Eroding trust in government directly affects planners' ability to engage communities and build inclusive participation processes. But counter movements have emerged, like in Orlando, Florida, where residents protested the removal of a rainbow painted crosswalk that was a memorial to the victims of the 2016 Pulse nightclub mass shooting.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: Planners can help rebuild trust by ensuring engagement opportunities are safe and inclusive. For example, they can offer hybrid community meetings and reaffirm local commitments to protect all residents.

Climate goals remain important to many companies' business plans—they might just not be talking about it. Greenwashing has given way to "greenhushing."

'Greenhushing' Is on the Rise

AT A TIME when some companies have rolled back their climate pledges or greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, others are continuing to meet the challenge—just without the public flag-waving.

A March 2025 PwC study found that of the roughly 6,900 companies surveyed, 84 percent said they intend to stand by their climate commitments while 37 percent said they are increasing their decarbonization targets. "Those findings may be surprising given the headlines that amplify news of companies retreating on their climate commitments," the study authors wrote, "but we are entering an era of quiet progress, where companies avoid publicizing climate pledges that can open them up to unwanted scrutiny and instead focus on making progress far from the spotlight." This strategy is called "greenhushing," an intentional ongoing act of self-censorship among private companies to keep doing, but not call attention to, their sustainability and climate work.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: While climate is inextricably embedded in the work of local planners, it may not need to be in the spotlight to be effective right now. Greenhushing gives planners the ability to shine attention onto other aspects of a project while continuing to make long-term progress on these goals.

The TikTok Effect on the Political Landscape

Being the first generation shaped by the smartphone, Gen Z—the cohort of people born between 1997 and 2012—has largely gravitated to places like TikTok and other social media platforms to consume news. As doomscrolling dominated their days during the pandemic, Gen Z grew up with unprecedented uncertainty about their future, and some have adopted a worldview dominated by institutional failure, untrustworthy governments, and a failing system.

According to Pew Research, 43 percent of young adults get their news from TikTok. While these platforms adapt to a user's likes, it does appear that right-leaning politicians and influencers have been more successful in gaining followers and shaping narratives than left-leaning ones. Influencers are shaping how young people perceive fairness, power, and opportunity.

TikTok's "Print Princess" Kelsey Russell promotes media literacy by sharing her takeaways from credible print publications.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: When engaging with younger generations, planners must meet them where they are online. Social media can be a tool for participation and co-creation, helping rebuild trust and relevance among the next generation of residents and stakeholders.

INSIGHT FROM OUR TREND SCOUTS

'We've already seen huge growth in youth unemployment…but what I'm wondering is how might we actually then grow a workforce of experienced knowledge workers?'

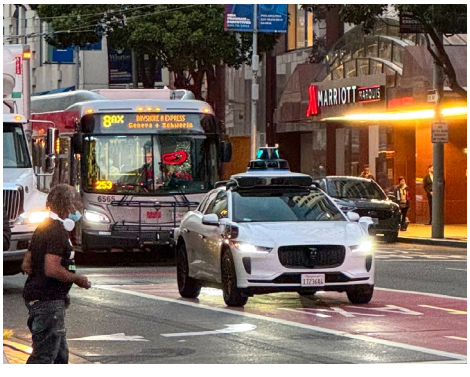
—Tanya Sakamoto, Waste System Performance Engineer, Calgary, Canada

Envisioning the Intersection of AVs and Public Transit

PICTURE THIS: The year is 2030, public transit funding has rebounded, and the widespread adoption of autonomous vehicles (AVs) has altered the local roadway norm as we know it. More people have given up their cars. AV companies are working with transit agencies, not in competition with them. The automotive industry has shifted its focus to electric vehicles, and transportation planners have begun working on new AV-transit hubs in city centers.

It sounds like a dream, but it might not be far off. AVs—which have been anticipated for a decade—are now hitting the road outside Silicon Valley and being tested in Boston, Philadelphia, and Austin, Texas. With the end of federal relief funding for public transit, new and growing technology like AVs could be the solution. But it's important to note that most AVs are still unreliable in poor weather and winter, and widespread adoption could actually lead to a surge in traffic congestion.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: Consider what wider use of AVs might mean for communities, including zoning and the impact on streets and curbs.



A Waymo AV taxi and city bus in San Francisco.

Disappearing Data Has Real-Life Consequences

Data is an integral part of many planning processes, and while it is gathered from myriad sources, federal data collection has long been vital for policymakers, businesses, nonprofits, and more. This longstanding data gathering practice was disrupted, however, when the new presidential administration took office in 2025, and paused, terminated, or removed several federal datasets. The administration also wants to change how certain datasets, like the decennial census, are collected.

While some of the data collections have intermittently been made public again—often by nonprofits and universities—this environment has created an avalanche of misinformation, given rise to conspiracy theories and public distrust, and may impact hazard and risk communications.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: The lack of reliable data directly imperils the ability of local planners to develop plans that are based on sound data. This can have dire consequences for decision-making, as well as hazard and risk communication.

FROM LEFT: CHRIS ARVIN; BORJA BONAQUE

Macomb, Illinois, businesses are suffering following a 47 percent drop in enrollment at Western Illinois University since 2010, plus the loss of state funding.

NICK SCHNELLE FOR *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Small College Towns Left Behind

WHO NEEDS college anyway? That appears to be a growing sentiment among U.S. adults, as a recent Gallup poll found that just 35 percent of respondents feel it is "very important" to earn a college degree. Additionally, while major and well-known universities appear to be maintaining status quo, a *Wall Street Journal* analysis found that lesser-known state universities saw an enrollment dip of2 percent in 2023, which amounts to tens of thousands of fewer students. This—paired with shifting demographics, federal funding issues, hiring freezes, and other challenges—is creating major headaches for smaller colleges and the towns that both support and rely on them.

Meanwhile, federal actions have targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and grants, and newly proposed visa regulations could potentially deter foreign students from wanting to study at U.S. schools. Skills-based hiring continues to rise, and the widespread adoption of AI is changing how white-collar jobs are performed.

IMPACT FOR PLANNERS: For decades, higher education served as an economic anchor for communities, but that era may end. The impacts on smaller college towns might include economic development challenges, job losses, and shrinking tax bases. Planners who work in these places will need to be proactive in helping them diversify revenue sources and find alternative uses for underused infrastructure.

Jon DePaolis is APA's senior editor.

WALKER HOUSE
540 BROAD

Newark, New Jersey

PROJECT: Built in 1929 for the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, the Art Deco building is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is now home to apartments, offices, and retail.

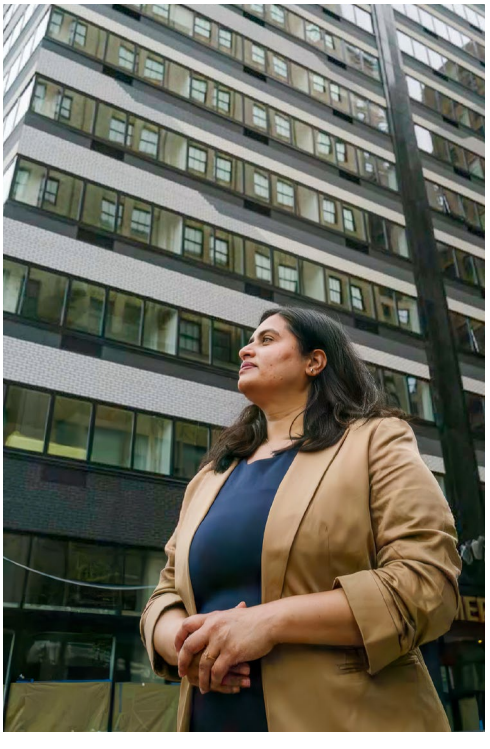
HOUSING: The sixth to 20th floors contain 264 apartments, a mix of studios and one-, two-, and three-bedrooms. Twenty percent are set aside for households earning 40 to 50 percent of the area median income.

OF NOTE: Newark's inclusionary zoning ordinance gives current city residents first access to rentals, which offer easy access to downtown, transit, and green spaces.

OLD Office NEW Job

Clockwise, from far left: The New Jersey Bell building in 2005; exterior details of the Walker House entrance; restored marble and ironwork in the lobby; an apartment interior. Below, Newark's Planning and Zoning Director Pallavi Shinde, AICP, PP, in front of 10 Commerce Court, another downtown office renovation.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; COURTESY L+M DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS (3); ELIANEL CLINTON



Adaptive reuse can help increase housing supply, but finding the right building and development partners is essential. *By* BILL JONES

EACH of the 71 units inside the new mixed-income housing development in East Greenville has the feel of something fresh and **NEW**.

But the building in the borough of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, also has a history, a story to tell. With three buildings dating from as early as 1880, it once was a manufacturing facility that produced caskets for the area's departed. Today, adaptive reuse has given it a second shot at life.

Planners guided the process of adaptive reuse—converting buildings that have outlived their original purposes to accommodate new uses—to transform the former manufacturing facility into The Willows at East Greenville.

Prior to that work, the buildings were in disrepair, says Pattie E.B. Guttenplan, AICP, RLA, deputy director for the Montgomery County Planning Commission and a member of Pennsylvania Chapter of APA. "It was a mess," she says. "One of the buildings, the roof [and walls were] gone."

But nearly a decade ago, the mid-Atlantic developer Ingerman and Genesis Housing Corporation saw the former manufacturing buildings as an opportunity to create housing ranging from market rates to affordable. Genesis is a nonprofit and community housing development organization that focuses in part on rehabilitation with an aim to provide affordable homes. The Willows is part of a collection of multifamily communities developed by Ingerman in a handful of Eastern states using the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which subsidizes development so long as it meets specific guidelines to create affordable housing.

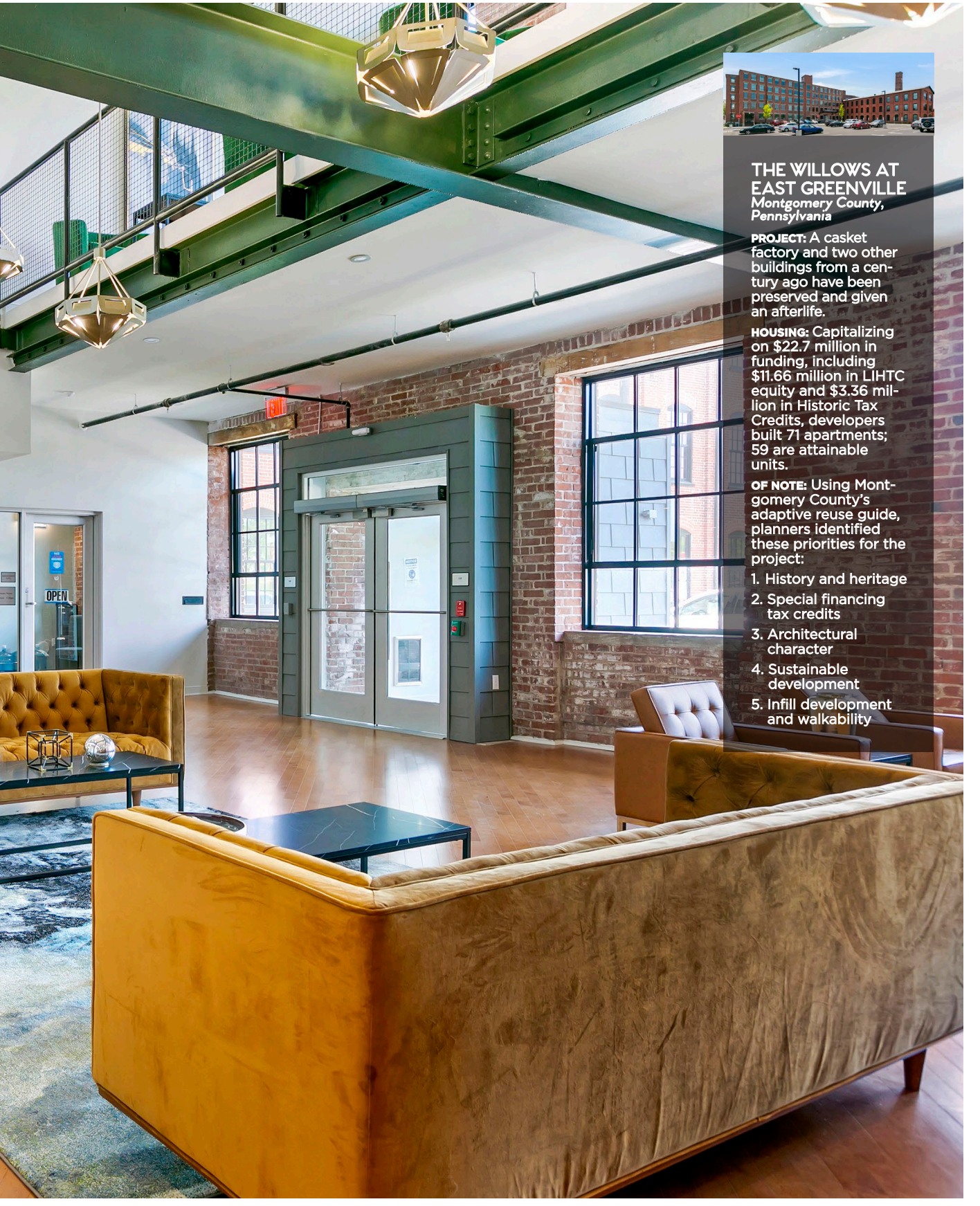
"East Greenville saw this as an opportunity to preserve these buildings and provide housing for their community," Guttenplan says. Supporters envisioned the development as a place where, for example, a single parent could live affordably and be able to stay in the area, where they might have struggled to find an affordable place before.

With guidance from Montgomery County, the borough allowed multifamily residential as an adaptive reuse in its limited industrial zoning district by limiting conversions to pre-1940 structures of at least 100,000 square feet. Projects must preserve historical exterior characteristics, limit density, create pedestrian circulation standards, require 30 percent common open space, and conduct a traffic impact study.

Financing support included $11.66 million in LIHTC equity and $3.36 million in Historic Tax Credit equity. In addition to those federal sources, the project received a $3.99 million permanent mortgage through Community Lenders, $1.91 million from Montgomery County, and $1.18 million from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.

Clockwise from above: Equipment left on-site when the Boyertown Burial Casket Company factory closed in 1988; an aerial view of the three buildings that became The Willows; the foyer with exposed brick and loft space. Below, Pattie E.B. Guttenplan, AICP, RLA, deputy director for the Montgomery County Planning Commission, credited part of the success to working with developers familiar with building low-income housing.

COURTESY DONOVAN ARCHITECTS (2); INGERMAN (2); CHARLES L. GUTTENPLAN, AICP, PP



THE WILLOWS AT EAST GREENVILLE

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

PROJECT: A casket factory and two other buildings from a century ago have been preserved and given an afterlife.

HOUSING: Capitalizing on $22.7 million in funding, including $11.66 million in LIHTC equity and $3.36 million in Historic Tax Credits, developers built 71 apartments; 59 are attainable units.

OF NOTE: Using Montgomery County's adaptive reuse guide, planners identified these priorities for the project:

1. History and heritage
2. Special financing tax credits
3. Architectural character
4. Sustainable development
5. Infill development and walkability

The Willows at Greenville also received Pennsylvania State Historic Tax Credit equity, a deferred development fee, energy rebates, and more. All of that required the architects to balance various requirements related to historic preservation and affordable housing. "That was part of the success," Guttenplan says, noting that working with people who had done this before was crucial. "To meet [those] criteria is sometimes challenging."

Montgomery County's adaptive reuse guide—outlining benefits and challenges, sharing best practices, and highlighting some of the county's other projects—was another important tool for developers. Several of the guide's featured projects focus on affordable housing. "There is a lot of interest in adaptive reuse," Guttenplan says.

And that interest isn't limited to Pennsylvania.

Filling up Newark's empty offices

No city may be more familiar with the challenges and benefits of adaptive reuse of office space than Newark, New Jersey. There, developers have been working to create hundreds of apartments through adaptive reuse—with some researchers saying the city will develop nearly 500 apartments in former office buildings.

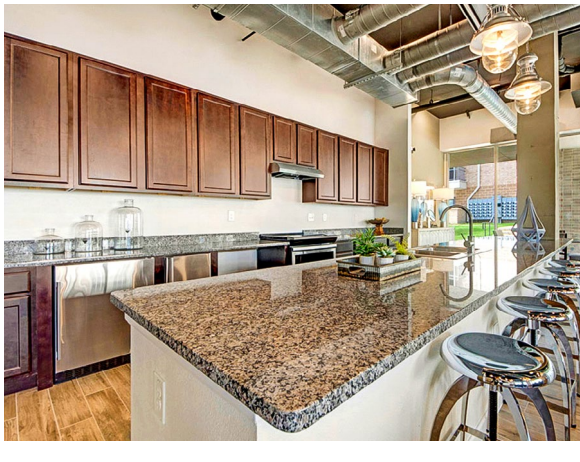
"It's happening because Newark has a lot of older office buildings," says Pallavi Shinde, AICP, PP, the city's planning and zoning director and a member of APA's New Jersey Chapter.

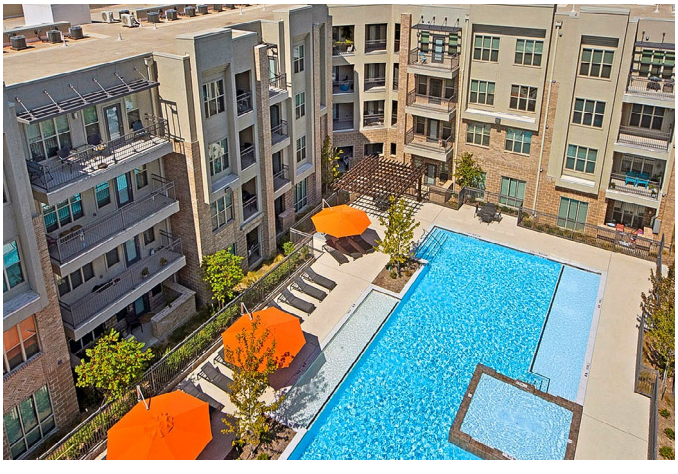
In the 1930s, Newark had a population of about 450,000. However, suburban flight, deindustrialization, and civil unrest in the 1960s contributed to the city's decline, Shinde says. Iconic buildings built by renowned architects remained vacant for years, and corporate offices closed or left. But she says that with its recent population increase—now slightly over 300,000—and demand for housing, developers saw a strong opportunity for adaptive reuse, transforming these underutilized spaces into residential units.

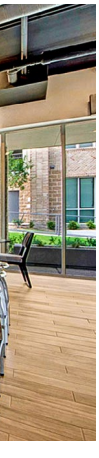
Among the projects in Newark is the downtown 10 Commerce Court building undergoing a conversion of 12 stories of office space to 110 housing units with ground floor retail and amenities in the basement. The nonprofit community development financial institution LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) provided an $8 million construction loan.

There also is the 21-story historic Walker House at 540 Broad Street. Built in 1929 for the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company's headquarters, it's now 264 loft rental apartments with ground floor retail. Another historic building undergoing a similar transformation is 10 Park Place, located downtown next to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Also built in the 1920s, it served as the headquarters of the Firemen's Insurance Company, Shinde says. After a long period of vacancy, it will now be converted into 231 affordable housing units.

These projects—along with Newark's 2023 inclusionary zoning ordinance, which allows those who already live in the city first dibs on new apartments during a 90-day period—provide Newark residents with affordable housing in the heart of the downtown with easy access to transit and green space, Shinde says. The ordinance mandates that all new residential, mixed-use developments or substantial rehabilitation projects with at least 15 residential units set aside 20 percent of those units as income-restricted,







Clockwise, from top: Exterior of the City Lofts complex; a pool in the courtyard; building amenities carved out of the old office tower. Angela Self, FAICP, former planner in Garland, Texas, and now planning director in Cedar Hill, Texas, has been working with adaptive reuse and historic preservation in Texas for 25 years.
COURTESY YIMPROS (3); WISE OWL MEDIA/APA

with a further breakdown for those to be set aside at various area median income levels.

"Our zoning ordinance is very permissive, but we do realize the challenges developers sometimes have in converting these spaces into residential or other uses," Shinde says, citing parking as one such issue. "Downtown Newark's proximity to Newark Penn Station, several light rail stations, and bus stops alleviates or reduces the need for parking, which is a substantial benefit for office-to-residential conversions."

Another challenge is ensuring proper access to the buildings. Shinde says mixed-use projects typically require separate entrances and older office buildings often impose constraints that limit the placement of new residential. "You need to make sure that every unit and every room in the residential unit has good light and ventilation," Shinde says. Those unit configurations can be a real puzzle.

The high cost of such conversions can make profitability tough, though a study by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Gensler suggest that co-living, dorm-style apartment designs could be the key to making some projects economically viable while also addressing several other considerations in the creation of affordable housing. It identified buildings in Seattle, Denver, and Minneapolis as "suitable" for that approach.

According to Pew, there's a shortage of between 4 million and 7 million homes in the U.S., while Moody's reports seeing a record high office vacancy rate of 20 percent. Newark's focus on adaptive reuse, which Shinde has seen trending since 2010, could offer some local relief from that national trend. It also can help stave off deterioration or demolition of older buildings and reinvigorate downtowns.

"It's wonderful to see some of these larger vacant buildings being brought back to life," Shinde says. "In a city like Newark, where we have lost so much of our historic fabric over the years, it's encouraging to see buildings that are not just standing as reminders of the past but finding a new purpose and contributing to the future. It's also a sustainable way to develop when we have these buildings that are still in good condition, not just aesthetically but also structurally."

Navigating adaptive reuse in North Texas

Adaptive reuse is not without its unique issues. Angela Self, FAICP, former planner in Garland, Texas, and now planning director in Cedar Hill, Texas, says the primary challenges of adaptive reuse are in figuring out how to take, for example, a 1960s building and adapt it to modern amenities and design.

"There's always something that you have to learn when it comes to reusing a building and converting it to a new use," says Self, chair of APA's Housing and Community Development Division. "One of the ways planners can really assist is by providing those best practices that are happening across the country."

In Garland, Self saw two former banks turned into multifamily residences. For both, it was important that city departments got involved early. With City Square Lofts—the conversion of a former Bank of America office into a multifamily, 9 percent LIHTC project—the team had to address a new form-based code for downtown. The Draper, a recent project that converted a former Chase Bank into multifamily, necessitated asbestos removal, which was made possible by a grant from the city.

"With both projects, there was the goal of continuing a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment to further connect each site to the historic downtown," Self says.

Arlington and Dallas—also in Self's North Texas area of expertise—have seen their fair share of adaptive reuse. "It's a tool that's been embraced here," she says, for affordable and market-rate housing projects. In underused and vacant buildings, she says, community-based developers see opportunities "to take something that has good bones and convert it into something that is very much needed."

Self says she has been working with adaptive reuse and historic preservation in Texas for about 25 years. In that time, she's seen the practice evolve. "Now, we're starting to look at office buildings that may not be historic in nature, although they may be older."

Self believes great partnerships—ones that match the city's long-term plans with what the market demands—are the key to successful adaptive reuse projects. "We're able to reuse buildings that still have a lot of viability," Self says. "They really just need new life."

Ensuring a good fit is crucial

Guttenplan says Montgomery County has seen a wide variety of adaptive reuses in recent years and a recognition that certain structures are valuable to keep, even older office parks. But, she says, not every office building is suitable for redevelopment—sometimes nearby residents oppose the change, or the structure is simply too deteriorated to make reuse feasible.

While many of the challenges of adaptive reuse fall on developers, Shinde says it is up to planners to make sure the project is a good fit for the community. "I don't see too many challenges on our side," she says. "But we try to make sure that the project integrates well within the context of the neighborhood and provides a good mix of decently sized units that include studio, one-, two-, and even three-bedroom units."

Bill Jones is a Chicago-area award-winning journalist and communications professional.

BUILDING ATTAINAB

Boosting more supply takes time

A perfect storm has fueled the housing crunch over the last decade in Hood River, Oregon.

Home to around 8,500 residents, the city is known as the windsurfing capital of the world. High demand from homebuyers drawn to the area's beauty and recreation caused prices to skyrocket, while the surging popularity of short-term rentals squeezed an already tight supply, says Dustin Nilsen, AICP, the city's planning director.

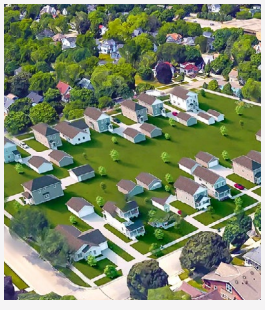
A lack of buildable land compounded the problem. Hood River sits between the protected Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and farmland beyond the city's urban growth boundary. "We really saw the need for the city to become increasingly active, and that meant broadening our efforts beyond just the zoning code and subdivision code," Nilsen says.

A MULTIPRONGED APPROACH IN OREGON. Planners in Hood River have used several strategies to increase housing affordability.

After placing limits on short-term rentals, city officials introduced a one percent construction

LE HOUSING IS A 'LONG GAME'

and ingenuity. Here's a look at some promising approaches. BY NATALIE MISSAKIAN



Domenica Park, in Waukesha, Wisconsin, built on the former site of the century-old Aeroshade factory (below), will have 20 homes, including townhomes (left), and single-family.

COURTESY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF WAUKESHA & JEFFERSON COUNTIES

excise tax (CET) to fund affordable housing back in 2017. Three years later, the income from the CET and state funding allowed the city to finance a loan to buy and rezone 7.25 acres for multifamily housing for $1.2 million, Nilsen says.

Hood River donated the land to Community Development Partners, an affordable housing developer, and the nonprofit Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation. Construction began this spring on the $75.8 million Mariposa Village, which will add 130 affordable units to the city.

Hood River also created the Westside Urban Renewal District in 2023, with hopes of collaborating on two more projects in the future. The district authorized a borrowing limit of $146.7 million to fund projects identified in the city's affordable housing strategy, parks master plan, and transportation plan.

Increasing affordable housing is a long game, Nilsen says, "and the first step is acknowledging there is an issue to be faced and that the community has a role in resolving it."

FINDING FUNDING FRIENDS IN WISCONSIN. The Oregon city is hardly alone in facing housing challenges and finding solutions. As rising demand and sparse inventory sends home prices soaring nationally, a handful of counties in southeastern Wisconsin have found success by banding together to take advantage of federal funding.

Located near Milwaukee, Waukesha County is the third-most populated county in the state. It faces similar housing challenges as that of larger communities but fails to qualify on its own for the federal HOME Investment Partnerships Program because of its size, says Kristin Silva, the county's community development manager.

A HOME consortium with adjacent Jefferson, Washington, and Ozaukee counties gives member counties direct access to funding. Governed by a 12-person board with three representatives from each county, the consortium provides down payment, home rehabilitation, and rental assistance to homeowners and renters, as well as low-interest loans and grants to affordable housing developers.

Waukesha County is the administrative entity for the consortium, and funds are awarded to each community on a first-come, first-served basis.

The partnership has provided partial funding totaling $10.6 million for 52 projects since 2000, boosting the affordable housing stock by more than 1,300 units, Silva says. Of those, 279 were funded solely through the HOME consortium, including 11 in Habitat for Humanity's Domenica Park subdivision that is now under construction.

Directly tapping HOME funds gives communities more control over how money is spent than going through state-administered programs, Silva says. For example, the consortium typically asks developers to set aside HOME-funded units for the most vulnerable residents, such as people with disabilities or those with the lowest incomes.

Silva finds HOME to be a great tool and hopes planners in small communities consider the option more often. "It can fit with a variety of other funding sources pretty easily to make a project more affordable," she says.

Natalie Missakian is a Connecticut-based writer who has covered state and federal policy.

HEALING FOREST

Yakama Nation, Washington

IF YOU START SEEING EXPLOSIONS OF GREEN VEGETATION on once-barren sites, they might just be Miyawaki mini forests, named after the Japanese botanist who developed the technique of planting dense and highly diverse forests of native trees. The approach helps fight the effects of habitat loss and a changing climate. A recent study found that mini forests are 36 degrees cooler than surrounding grass at the hottest time of the day. These tiny but mighty ecosystems also connect people with nature, a key driver behind the 27,000-square-foot Healing Forest at the Yakama Nation Corrections and Rehabilitation Facility, which organizers say "restores harmony between body, mind, and spirit, and the relationships with family, community, and nature." —*Ben Hitchings,* FAICP

The Healing Forest flourishes with native birch, black spruces, wild roses, and violets, while also cultivating spiritual and cultural connections. Read more about mini forests at planning.org/planning. (Got a climate win-win that makes your Community Green? Tell us about it: email mstromberg@planning.org.)

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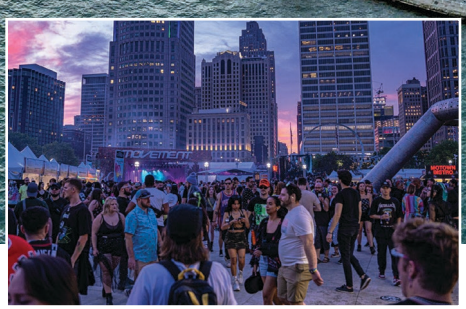

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