Downtown La Crescent Vision and Strategic Plan

Vernon Deines Award for Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan for 2018

The City of La Crescent, Minnesota, and their 4,300 citizen inhabit the bluffs above the Mississippi River, across from the larger La Crosse, Wisconsin. The City, however, is no runner-up to La Crosse, or for that matter to Winona, Minnesota, the county seat. Working together with consultants MSA Professional Services, Inc. of Madison, Wisconsin, City elected officials and staff created the Downtown La Crescent Vision and Strategic Plan, through an extensive process of community discussion and engagement.

The APA Small Town & Rural Planning Division awards the Vernon Deines Award for Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan for 2018 to the City of La Crescent. "The awards committee was impressed by the City of La Crescent leadership’s proactive role in improving their home town," said John Shepard, AICP; APA STaR Vice Chair for Communications. "The downtown plan is both focused on practical implementation and the long-term vision for the community."

The Downtown La Crescent Vision and Strategic Plan was adopted in December 2017, so implementation is still very fresh. As noted in their application:

“Detailed conceptual images and action steps are shown to improve the City’s ability to

-Continued on page 6

Vernon Deines Award for Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan:

- Downtown LaCrescent Vision and Strategic Plan, City of LaCrescent, MN
- Merit Award to Small Town Tactics: Tactical Urbanism Strategies as a Community Engagement Tool, Town of Avon, CO

John Keller Award for Planning Initiative:

- Plan Brandon! Zoning Code, City of Brandon, MS
- Merit Award to Protecting Opportunities for Rural Cannabis Farmers in Washington (Crystal Oliver), Spokane County, WA

See project profiles inside and in the next edition of Small Town & Rural Planning News. Entries for 2019 are open through December 14—See page 4.
Greetings STaR Members!

It’s October, which means it’s time for your Fall Newsletter. As is typical of this newsletter, we have some important and exciting updates from the Fall Leadership meetings. Each fall, the chairs of all 22 divisions gather to discuss division business and ways to improve our service to members, and this year was no different.

In the coming months, APA will launch its new online learning platform APA Learn. You will be able to complete distance learning and immediately log your CM credits. The system allows you to pause and come back where you left off hours, days, and even weeks later. STaR will be working to add content relevant to our membership, particularly for law and ethics. Expect additional information from APA this winter. I was able to test the system last week, and it’s really cool!

Planning Home, APA’s latest initiative, continues to be a main focus. It provides a framework for APA’s Action Agenda in an effort to address the nation’s housing affordability crisis. Six principles drive the agenda – Modernize State Planning Laws, Reform Local Codes, Promote Inclusionary Growth, Remove Barriers to Multifamily Housing, Turn NIMBY into YIMBY, and Re-think Finance. All 22 Divisions have agreed to adopt this as the Division’s Council main policy initiative for the next year, as housing affordability cut across all of our divisions and provides an opportunity to highlight the diverse work we do. If you are interested in assisting in identifying information and content from a Small Town or Rural perspective, please let me know.

As part of the division meetings is the APA Policy Conference, where the Great Places in America Awards were announced. A number of smaller communities were recognized, including Aspen, Colorado, for the Pedestrian Malls, Guthrie, Oklahoma’s Historic District, the Village of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, and State Street in Bristol Tennessee/Virginia. It’s always exciting to see smaller communities recognized for our special neighborhoods, spaces, and streets.

Also announced was the retirement of APA CEO Jim Drinan. Jim’s done a tremendous job moving the organization forward. The search for the next CEO is underway, and is expected to be selected in the Spring, prior to the National Planning Conference. Divisions Council is able to provide input on this, so if you have any thoughts on the selection process, please reach out.

Earlier this fall, the results of the Division elections were announced. All the current officers were re-elected, and Anna Laybourn, a Principal with Design Workshop, was elected as the Vice Chair for Conferences and Programs. We are working to get all our contact information updated on the website. Congrats to everyone, and thank you to everyone who voted!

Later this fall, look for the bi-annual STaR membership survey. This is your opportunity to tell us how we are doing and to help us create our work program. As always, please reach out if you have any thoughts, ideas, or questions. Happy fall!
**STaR Division Elections**

Your Small Town & Rural Planning Division participates in the joint chapter/divisions elections for the American Planning Association. Board members serve two year terms. Ballots were made available online in August, and results released on September 14th, 2018.

Your STaR Board for 2019-2020 will be:

- **Chair:** Jessica Garrow, AICP; City of Aspen, Colorado
- **Vice Chair-Programs:** Anna Layborn, AICP; Design Workshop, Aspen, Colorado
- **Vice Chair-Communications:** John C. Shepard, AICP; Archuleta County, Pagosa Springs, Colorado
- **Secretary/Treasurer:** Robert L. Barber, FAICP; Orion Planning & Design, Hernando, Mississippi
- **Student Representative:** Roderick Hall, University of Oregon

Thanks go out to everybody who volunteered to be nominated. We are only as good as all of our members working together.

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**Mountain and Resort Town Planners Summit, November 28-30**

The bi-annual Mountain and Resort Town Planners Conference is coming up, this year in Canmore, Canada. The theme is “Planning Across Boundaries: A Regional Approach.” The Mountain and Resort Town Planners Summit is geared toward city planners, citizen planners, community activists, elected/appointed officials, design professionals, conservationists, academics, and anyone else committed to addressing the unique challenges faced by mountain communities. For more information, check out the [conference website](#).

The summit is focused on interaction among its attendees, weaving expert speakers with collaborative solution-making. The 2.5-day conference features a variety of panel discussions, roundtable discussions, tours, and plenty of social events. And of course, there is the ski day! The conference schedule is available [here](#).

Perennial conference topics include workforce housing, seasonal populations, sustainability, co-existence with the natural environment, transportation, and regional collaboration. This year’s Summit also includes two tours - one in Banff and one in Canmore - that showcase implemented solutions to common mountain town issues.
STaR Awards for 2019

Award nominations for 2019 are now open!

Nominate an outstanding small town or rural project or planner today! Nominations are due by close of business December 14, 2018. Complete details on our website: https://www.planning.org/divisions/smalltown/awards/

The Small Town and Rural (STAR) Planning Division invites nominations for its Planning Awards to recognize outstanding individuals and projects for their contribution to planning excellence in small town and rural communities. The program is open to any individual, organization, or consulting firm involved in planning for small town and rural areas.

Over the past few years STaR has awarded two communities with the Vernon Deines Award for an Outstanding Small Town or Rural Plan – one in a very small community and one in a larger community. In recognition of this, STaR will continue using two subcategories for Outstanding Small Town or Rural Plan based on jurisdiction size: Small Jurisdiction is for communities under 50,000 people, and Large Jurisdiction is for communities over 50,000. While there is no set number that defines a small town or rural area, we believe this format provides added guidance and clarity to the awards process.

Award recipients will receive the award, a one-year membership in the STAR Division, and may be eligible to receive some reimbursement of travel, lodging and/or registration expenses for public sector or academic employees to attend the APA National Planning Conference. The award categories are:

Vernon Deines Award for Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan
Given to an outstanding comprehensive plan or special project plan that addressed the development of a neighborhood, community, county or region.

John Keller Award for Planning Initiative
Given to an outstanding initiative or program in public education, workshops, ordinances, or enforcement that promotes planning in small towns and rural areas.

James A. Segedy Award for Student Project
Given to an outstanding project by a graduate or undergraduate class or individual that addresses a planning issue facing small town or rural areas.

Members of the Awards Committee (and their organizations) are not eligible for an award. Nominated plans, projects, programs and studies must have been completed within two years of the nomination submittal date. For Comprehensive Plans and Special Project Plans prepared by consultants, the award recipient shall be the client for whom the planning activity was conducted.

Carol Thomas Award for Small Town & Rural Planner
Given to an individual in public service, academia or the private sector that has made an outstanding contribution to planning in their community.
APA Great Places for 2018

The American Planning Association (APA) has announced the country's 15 Great Places for 2018 through the organization’s national flagship program, Great Places in America.

APA’s Great Places in America recognizes unique and exemplary streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces — three essential components of all communities. These authentic places have been shaped by forward thinking planning that showcases affordable transportation options, promotes community involvement and accessibility, and fosters economic opportunity.

"Our Great Places in America designees highlight the many facets that make up planning — from community engagement, quality of character, and economic development," said Cynthia Bowen, FAICP, president of APA. "These neighborhoods, streets, and public spaces illustrate how a community coming together creates lasting value. It is an honor to recognize these outstanding places as a countdown to National Community Planning Month."

APA Great Places showcases the best examples of where and how people work and live every day. They are defined by many characteristics including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community involvement. The 290 Great Places designated to date are located in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Great Places in America is one of the ways APA starts the countdown to National Community Planning Month each October, a month-long event celebrating the accomplishments of the many residents, leaders, officials, and professionals who contribute to making great communities through the planning process.

Again this year, APA seeks further input from the public for the “People’s Choice” designee. Nominate a favorite Great Place by commenting on APA’s Facebook page, Twitter or Instagram feed using hashtag #APAgreatplaces from October 1–12. Online voting will take place the second half of October, with the “People’s Choice” Great Place designee being announced November 7.

The 2018 Great Places in America designees are listed on the APA website. To learn more about each of this year’s designees, visit www.planning.org/greatplaces.
LaCrescent Plan
facilitate public and private investment in the downtown. The plan is intended to help the citizens of La Crescent, business owners and developers envision positive change in La Crescent and get excited about that change. Successful downtown revitalization requires public and private collaboration, and public enthusiasm for such change is an important ingredient in that collaborative process. This plan should give property owners and developers the confidence to propose change.”

Also in the nomination, Donald Smith, Chair of the La Crescent Planning Commission, endorsed the consultants’ role: “We whole-heartedly endorse the work by MSA’s planners, their sensitivity for the uniqueness of our community and a plan that can guide us toward a better future. It already has.”

One award juror remarked this plan was “focused” and vetted against implementation realities, in particular citing the “Key Ideas” presented. “[The plan has] clear implementation actions. This is great and avoids the pitfalls of many plans of trying to get everything completed, often turning out to be impossible.”

Another award juror noted that this plan emphasized action in implementation, and would provide a “great template for other downtowns.”

Ten Key Ideas for Downtown La Crescent
1. New Development—especially more residential units downtown
2. Public Parking
3. The City will Assist with Property Acquisition
4. The City should Act as a Partner in Redevelopment
5. New City Hall
6. Bike Bridge and Trailhead Improvements
7. Downtown should be a Place to Gather & Socialize
8. Improvements to Downtown Access Points
9. Commitment to Environmental Stewardship
10. This Won’t be Easy or Fast
Plan Brandon! Zoning Code
John Keller Award for Planning Initiative for 2018

In 2014, the Board of Aldermen of the City of Brandon, Mississippi, population 23,800, voted to undertake a new comprehensive plan and zoning code. They brought on board Orion Planning & Design, with Weir Boerner Allen Architects, Arnett Muldrow Associates, and Alta Planning + Design. The Plan Brandon! Comprehensive Plan was completed in the fall of 2015, and the Plan Brandon! Zoning Code adopted in March 2016.

The APA Small Town & Rural Planning Division awards the John Keller Award for Planning Initiative for 2018 to the City of Brandon. "The awards committee was impressed with the excellent use of graphics to illustrate what can be dense bureaucratic rules and regulations," said John Shepard, AICP; APA STA R Vice Chair for Communications. "The Brandon Zoning Code provides a model for any size community."

Implementing the comprehensive plan, the new zoning code replaced a “clunky” thirty-year old code which had undergone extensive piecemeal additions. The intent was to provide the public with a streamlined, well organized, well-illustrated, user friendly new code which directly reflects the place types and street types as defined in the comprehensive plan. The new code also created a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) district—while perhaps the norm in larger jurisdictions, still an uncommon feature in many sprawling small towns and rural areas.

The STA R awards committee noted the quality of the document, and usability for staff. The graphics, in particular, seem easy to read and use. While a plan might sit on a shelf, our zoning codes seldom stay closed for long. Local leaders were engaged in the process, and brought in extensive public involvement.

As one awards juror stated, “moving from sprawl to place-based planning is always excellent.”

Community engagement in Plan Brandon! process
STaR gets Social (Media, that is!)  
Selections from our Twitter feed

The American Planning Association and APA STaR maintain a presence across social media to bring you the latest and greatest news and information throughout the year.

Check out our Facebook and LinkedIn pages, and our Twitter feed @APA_SmallTown, for timely updates between editions.

Newly-elected Vice Chair-Programs Anna Laybourn, AICP at the Colorado APA annual conference in Keystone, CO.
STaR News Ten Years On: Autumn 2008

What were STaR Division planners talking about in the Small town & Rural Planning News ten years ago?

The current look and feel for your quarterly newsletter debuted in the Autumn of 2008. Maybe we’re due for an overhaul, but for now I think we have a “classic” look and feel.

The cover featured Cullman, Alabama’s All-Electronic Comprehensive Plan, quite an accomplishment for a community of 17,000. Remember when the web was going to give us all paperless offices? At that time we were still talking about MySpace.

Just as we’re preparing for #APA19 in San Francisco, then Chair Dave Gattis, FAICP, was preparing for the National Planning Conference in Minneapolis-St. Paul (your current editor was on the Conference Committee, which was more work and more rewarding than I ever expected).

Mr. Gattis also reported on his ongoing conversations on Small Town Planning with quotes from the field, such as:

Jon Sevald, Sherburne Co, MN:
A small town planner is often a one-man shop where the planner is exposed to several issues and experiences. In smaller communities, there’s a better chance of knowing and understanding the local community compared to big city or suburban planners.

Division members can read your own back issues of our newsletter since 2004 on the APA STaR webpage: https://www.planning.org/divisions/smalltown/newsletter.
APA’s Divisions and Chapters sponsor a series of weekly webcasts, at no cost to members, to help you gain CM credits you need... and maybe learn something if you’re not careful.

**October 26 – How to Mobilize and Turn Volunteers Into Leaders in Your Community** — FL Chapter
(CM credit pending)

Keeping volunteers engaged is key to any community planning project that relies on the altruistic investment of its residents.

**November 9 – Innovative Financing for Transportation Projects** — Transportation Planning Division
(CM credit pending)

*Details to be announced.*

Upcoming sessions will be sponsored by the Hazard Mitigation & Disaster Recovery Division and Planning & the Black Community Division. You can see the current listing of all webcasts at [www.ohioplanning.org/planningwebcast](http://www.ohioplanning.org/planningwebcast).

**Distance Education** – webcast recordings were approved for CM credit for viewing in 2016:
- **Images, Creative Commons and Copyright** - 1.5 CM LAW Credits (#9143138)
- **Queer and the Conversation: The Ethics of Inclusion**
  - 1.5 CM ETHICS Credits (#9143146)

For video recordings of past webcasts, visit the Planning Webcast Series YouTube Channel at [www.youtube.com/planningwebcast](http://www.youtube.com/planningwebcast).

**APA Advocacy**

Your American Planning Association keeps an eye on Federal policy in Washington, DC. The annual Policy & Advocacy Conference is underway as this edition goes to press.

This year, we are paying particular attention to the Farm Bill. APA offered a Farm Bill Issue Briefing in August, which is available online for review: [https://youtu.be/a9CIXTej8As](https://youtu.be/a9CIXTej8As). APA encourages members to contact their representatives directly to communicate the importance of well-considered policy.

More information is available from Emily Pasi, APA Public Affairs Manager, on the APA blog: [https://planning.org/blog/](https://planning.org/blog/) and from the Planners Advocacy Network: [https://planning.org/advocacy/](https://planning.org/advocacy/).
Member Spotlight:
Wendy E. Moeller, FAICP; Compass Point Planning

Name: Wendy E. Moeller, FAICP

Position: Principal and Owner of Compass Point Planning

Education: Bachelor of Urban Planning (1996) – University of Cincinnati

APA Involvement: Currently I am the Region IV Director on the APA Board of Directors but I have been involved in leadership since the early days of my career at the state and local level as well.

How did you become interested in planning? I always had an interest in architecture, engineering, and how things worked. I started out in college as an engineering major but found that it wasn’t as fulfilling as I thought it would be. I transferred to the University of Cincinnati and applied to the School of Planning. One quarter of planning classes and I was hooked. I love that planners evaluate the interrelationship of all aspects of our communities and define how we can work together to set a vision and then take action to achieve that vision.

How did you get involved in APA? My past bosses all served in APA leadership and were very supportive of my involvement. I started volunteering with the Cincinnati section of APA-Ohio when I was fresh out of college. That led to my role at the state chapter, which ultimately led to my current role as the APA Region IV Director.

What’s the most interesting project you’re working on? As a private consultant with multiple projects, I have to say that all of my projects are the most interesting! Sometimes it is an exciting project or development, other times it is the people and staff that are involved. I have enjoyed getting to work with every range of community.

What is one of your biggest successes? There was the first project that I won after I ventured out on my own with my firm, Compass Point Planning. I am also very proud of the work that led to my report on regulating temporary signs. At the time it seemed like such a basic topic but ended up being a timely piece of research that a lot of people have used.

Are you noticing trends among small towns in your practice? A lot of small towns and rural areas are realizing the benefits of working cooperatively within their region. They are joining forces on plans for mobility, parks and recreation, and economic development. This a positive change because I remember early on in my career thinking that most communities were very territorial and that there were a lot of missed opportunities to improve the region in a more collaborative effort.

Advice for planners just starting out? Don’t be afraid to say yes. Early in your career, everything is part of the learning process and sometimes the path your career ultimately takes may start from saying yes to something simple such as volunteering at a conference or working on a specialty project you may have not otherwise had an opportunity to participate in.

What’s the best part of working in small towns & rural areas? I like getting to know staff and all the elected and appoint officials. There are typically a smaller number of staff and officials so they often have larger roles in the day-to-day operations of the community. This means that they tend to be more hands on with projects. As planners, we always look for that kind of engagement as a way of making our plans stronger over the long-term.

Note: Several STaR members were honored as new Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners (FAICP) this year.
New Ruralism at Colorado APA

By John C. Shepard, AICP; Vice Chair-Communications

New Ruralism isn’t New Urbanism writ small, similar to the way small town & rural planning isn’t just urban planning with fewer people. New Ruralism is different, and the STaR Division is working with the Chapter Presidents Council, the Divisions Council, and some other good folks across the country exploring that difference.

New Ruralism focuses on what makes rural communities thriving, healthy, attractive places...or at least heading in that direction. It’s also about sustainability at the intersection of the Environment, Economy, and Society values.

STaR Chair Jessica Garrow, AICP, and Vice Chair John Shepard, AICP, brought our facilitated discussion from the National Planning Conference to the Colorado APA annual conference on October 4, 2018, at Keystone, CO. About two dozen planners from across the state (including the small & rural parts of Metro Denver) spent lunch talking about:

- How do we better define “New Ruralism”?
  What do we mean by “thriving”? Successful communities understand and take advantage of realities of modern life. Western New Ruralism may be different than on the East Coast.

- What locally-grown initiatives have we seen in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West?
  Elizabeth, CO, has repurposed retail buildings. Palisade, CO, fruit & wine byway, Salida and Durango have small business incubators and makerspace. Many mountain towns are shifting from two-seasons to four-seasons recreation and tourism.

- What are key ingredients to success?
  Character, culture, viability, community are all important to long-term success. Community leadership is essential, but so is good professional staff. Zoning must accommodate community values.

Watch this space for more updates on the STaR New Ruralism project.