

COUNTY PLANNING

APA
American Planning Association
County Planning Division
Making Great Communities Happen

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Atlanta skyline (photo credit: Robert Wible)

Changing times for suburban counties

by **Robert Wible**, National Partnership to Streamline Government

Editorial Notes: **Megan Nelms**, AICP, President, County Planning Division/National Association of County Planners,

The following article was developed from a request by Mr. Wible in regards to “finding out how others get it done.” We all understand what we do as planners, but sometimes the information, even in the digital age, on how to best accomplish your goal can be hard to find. The networking, discussions and concrete work on “best practices” is scattered.

We offer the following as a starting block for these discussions and exchange of information. What can you offer to help answer these questions? How can we assist our fellow planners to get the information out there and accessible?

As I begin my Presidency, I want a goal of the next two years to be to utilize technology, social media and other methods to become a resource for information. The Division is here to assist you in helping you to do your job better and more efficiently, and exchange of information is first step in creating those connections and providing that help.

I look forward to hearing your responses and interacting with my fellow County Planners. Please, do not hesitate to contact me with your ideas, questions and comments about this article, and the Division at MBL08@ccgov.net.

Challenges

A combination of forces ranging from formatting a response to global warming to stimulating the economic recovery of the nation from the “great recession,” are stressing the zoning, land use and planning systems largely adopted in the 1920’s and then modernized in the 1960’s and 70’s.

Jurisdiction after jurisdiction are looking to become both more environmentally and economically sustainable by adopting new technologies and growth models and in many cases looking to streamline their overall planning, land use and zoning processes making access to them

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Greetings from the County Planning Division Chair Megan Nelms, AICP

Hello! I hope all you County Planners have been enjoying a fruitful summer so far! I am your new County Planning Division President, Megan Nelms, AICP. I am excited to begin my term as President and hope to continue to bring you value, insight, resources and information through your membership in the County Planning Division!

I hail from Campbell County, Wyoming. Our county seat is Gillette – the Energy Capital of the nation. We are rich in coal, oil, natural gas and other natural resources. A wide open county of over 5 million acres of mostly private land, we have a population of approximately 50,000 countywide. I have served as the County Planner and Zoning Administrator for eight years. I received my Bachelor's degree in Geography from the University of Wyoming and my Masters in Rural Sociology and Community Development from South Dakota State.

Our outgoing President, Tim Brown, has done an excellent job shoring up the Division's finances and increasing

our membership numbers. Tim's work has been instrumental in setting the division up for success in the future. At the Seattle Conference, Tim was awarded the APA Divisions Council Chair Award. This award recognizes outstanding efforts by division members that go beyond the minimums. We are lucky to have had Tim in our leadership position to bring the division to where we are today.

As President, my goals for the division are leadership succession and outreach. First, we need to create a leadership resource for our division to keep it successful in the long run. New board members need a resource to utilize to keep the organization running smoothly as we transition board members every few years. I will work on developing this resource during my tenure.

Secondly, I would like to expand our online presence, especially through social media. So many of us now jump on the internet to find information, best practices, resources and networking opportunities with our fellow county planners. The division currently has a [LinkedIn page](#) where you can find or start discussions on topics affecting those in our field and network with fellow division members. We will also soon be creating a Facebook page. When the time comes, please LIKE us on Facebook to get

timely information on our webinars, newsletter articles, division updates and more! Thank you again for your continued membership in the division. Please let me know of ways that the division can assist you in doing your job better. And as always, we are looking for volunteers to serve on the board in various capacities, so if you are interested, please contact me at mbl08@ccgov.net at any time! I look forward to hearing from you!

NEWSLETTER Schedule

SPRING

Submittal deadline: March 15

SUMMER

Submittal deadline: June 15

FALL

Submittal deadline: September 15

WINTER

Submittal deadline: December 15

NEWSLETTER INFORMATION: This newsletter is published by the County Planning Division of the American Planning Association. Circulation is to the APA members of the County Planning Division (CPD). We welcome submission of original articles, editorial letters, and any other information of interest to County planners. Submissions should be made to the newsletter editor:

Jacqui Kamp
email: jacqui.kamp@clark.wa.gov

OUR MISSION: *The County Planning Division of the APA seeks to strengthen relationships among county planners, county elected officials, and other county personnel by facilitating the sharing of technical information, encouraging continuing professional development of its members, researching county planning issues, and building strong ties with other organizations and disciplines with related interests.*

Planner Profile: Getting to know our members



Charlie Compton, FAICP
Lexington County, South Carolina
Director of Planning & GIS

The Importance of Peer to Peer Communication

by Charlie Compton, FAICP, Lexington County, South Carolina

difficult through the U.S. Postal Service, Ma Bell with expensive long distance rates, or that County vehicle from the motor pool. Continuing to learn after Planning School took much more effort than today.

I was already a member of AIP and ASPO and read every publication cover to cover. I became a charter member of APA when that opportunity arrived. In 1974 I also discovered NACPD, the *National Association of County Planning Directors*. It was formed in 1965 as an affiliate of NACo. The thirst for county planning ideas was so great that by 1980 there were over 600 members even with the membership limited to just planning directors. Eventually that organization was changed to *The National Association of County Planners (NACP)* to include all those interested in county planning.

In South Carolina in the '70's, there were only a handful of planning directors and we decided to meet once every three months at one of our offices. The morning was spent hearing from an expert on a selected topic and the afternoon was a "how they do it" tour and briefing at the host location. Before we went home we selected a topic, location, and date for the next meeting. No by-laws, no officers, and no dues – just a wonderful exchange of ideas and a very "low maintenance" educational experience.

The South Carolina APA Chapter quickly became an amazing provider of planning

education, leading to the 2015 Karen B. Smith Award for Overall Chapter Achievement. Us old-timers always thought we did a great job leading that organization, but the newer members keep showing us how to do it even better. APA Chapters have often been the best suppliers of up-to-date training and peer-to-peer sharing of ideas and planning concepts.

However, planning is a very diverse profession. It is loaded with many specialties bursting with unique demands that call for focused training and sharing of ideas. The 21 Divisions in APA are there to assist with this challenge. Ten years ago there was a very dedicated group of county planners who had maintained an active role in NACP that were frustrated over the lack of a County Planning Division in APA. There were divisions for City Planning, Small Town and Rural Planning, Regional Planning, and even Federal and International.

Counties in many ways are extremely different from their counterparts – the municipalities. They frequently contend with sheer size and unique diversities of development philosophies.

Municipalities generally have a basic structure and infrastructure, while counties often come with expansive geography equipped with little or no structure or infrastructure. And with all of these obstacles, some counties get the grand opportunity of

[Cont'd. p. 4](#)

When I graduated from Clemson in 1974, an old family friend who was the Lexington County Attorney convinced me that I needed to come back home and start a planning program. My first plan was to devote five years to Lexington County and then get on with my real career in consulting. That was my first failure at plan implementation. It is 41 years later and I am still the Lexington County Planning Director, . . . and with no regrets. Being a planner where I grew up, as well as where I raised my family, has given me an important perspective on the issues we address. It has also given me a great deal of satisfaction when we accomplish really good things.

In 2009 the South Carolina APA Chapter celebrated the 40-year anniversary of a state planning organization. I was asked to help reminisce about those 40 years. The most noticeable change was in the way we communicate. Imagine it is 1974. Communication with other planners and jurisdictions was slow and

Charlie Compton, [cont'd. from p. 4](#)

having a planning palette that contains vast quantities of undeveloped land. We like to refer to Counties as places where the variety is great, the challenges are daunting, and the potential is fantastic.

The process of applying for the creation of a County Planning Division began in 2005 and involved a phenomenal effort over the next two years with many obstacles along the way. In April 2007 the Division received a stirring approval from the APA Board of Directors after very strong endorsements by the Chapter Presidents Council and the Divisions Council.

The application process required the establishment of a Steering Committee with at least one APA Member representative from each of APA's six [regions](#). The following individuals (with

their 2006 locations) served on that Committee, including many who continue to give of their time to support county planning: **Mike Kayes**, Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, New York; **Angela Harper**, Henrico County, Virginia; **Charlie Compton** (Steering Committee Chair), Lexington County, South Carolina; **Judy Francis**, Office of Conservation and Community Affairs, North Carolina; **Nicki van Vonno**, Martin County, Florida; **Sam Russell**, Desoto County, Mississippi; **Dennis Sandquist**, Lake County, Illinois; **Keith Cubic**, Douglas County, Oregon; **Julio Iturreria**, Arapahoe County, Colorado; **Joe Scorcio**, Pierce County, Washington; **Mike Harper**, Washoe County, Nevada.

If you are willing to take the initiative, you have available to you wonderful

opportunities for peer-to-peer communication. Commit yourself to a career filled with training and sharing. Make the County Planning Division the sharing vehicle that it is intended to be. And remember that your membership in NACP gives you a very rewarding opportunity to interact and provide training to those elected officials who have earned the right to make the final decisions on county planning issues.

I will end this article in the same way we greeted each other when we first formed the County Planning Division.

"758, 280"

That means I represent a County that is 758 square miles and has a population 280,000.



AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

PHOENIX

IMPORTANT DATES—CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Division member session proposal due July 30

Facilitated discussion session proposal due Aug. 18

Your brightest ideas. Your biggest news. Your boldest vision. Propose a session, workshop, or discussion and tell us what's on planning's next horizon. You'll help make the 2016 NPC the hottest place to be.

[See the details](#)

[Get tips for submitting proposals](#)

[View sample accepted proposals](#)

Key Dates for Speakers and Organizers

July 17, 2015	Volunteer to review proposals deadline. Fill out the form to volunteer
July 30, 2015	Division, mobile workshop, and Local Host Committee proposals due
August 20, 2015	Session, workshop, facilitated discussion, general posters, and Fast and Funny proposals due Speakers confirmed
October 15, 2015	Student poster and Student Fast and Funny proposals due
November 16, 2015	Proposal acceptance notifications sent to proposers, organizers, and speakers
December 17, 2015	Speaker permissions and bios due
February 4, 2016	Speaker conference registration deadline
March 3–31, 2016	Window to upload session PowerPoints
April 2–5, 2016	National Planning Conference in Phoenix

AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION



Fellow of AICP

Fellows of AICP are honored in recognition of the achievements of the planner as an individual, elevating the Fellow before the public and the profession as a model planner who has made significant contributions to planning and society. Fellowship is granted to planners who have been members of AICP and have achieved excellence in professional practice, teaching and mentoring, research, public and community service, and leadership. Those chosen become members of the College of Fellows.

The College of Fellows is concerned with mentoring and future advancement of the profession of planning. As outstanding professionals in the field of planning, Fellows of AICP will address student organizations, state APA conferences, and professional development programs.

Class of 2016 Nominations

Nominations for the next class of AICP Fellows are due **November 5, 2015**. Please review the newly revised Nomination Guidelines along with the Nomination Form and Nomination Checklist (both required for all submissions). APA Chapters and Divisions are encouraged to begin their process of candidate selection and nomination preparation as early as possible to ensure the best nominations possible for their candidates. A tutorial that provides helpful tips on creating successful nominations is provided below.

Questions regarding the AICP College of Fellows may be submitted to fellows@planning.org.

[FAICP Nomination Guidelines \(pdf\)](#)

[FAICP Nomination Form \(pdf\)](#)

[FAICP Nomination Checklist \(pdf\)](#)

For more information about how to put a nomination together, and common questions and answers, check out the [webinar](#) put together in 2013 by APA chapter leaders.

AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

NEWS

APA Applauds Supreme Court Decision Preserving Fair Housing Tool – June 25, 2015

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Supreme Court's decision today in Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. The Inclusive Communities Project, Inc. reaffirms the value of disparate-impact analysis in ensuring fair housing. The decision also adds clarity for planners, local officials and courts on how disparate-impact analysis can be used. While preserving this important tool in promoting fair housing, the Court also validated the ability of local communities to legitimately consider competing interests such as revitalizing urban communities in making housing decisions.

The American Planning Association (APA) filed an amicus brief in support of the Inclusive Communities Project. APA is pleased with the outcome and is thankful to the Supreme Court for preserving such an important tool.

"APA applauds the Court on upholding disparate-impact as part of planning for fair housing," said Carol Rhea, FAICP, president of the American Planning Association. "APA continues to be a strong advocate of preserving Fair Housing practices in communities across the country. The ruling further underscores the value of planning analysis in making transparent, local decisions on fair, affordable housing."

In this case, a Dallas-based housing advocacy non-profit argued that the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) gave tax credits to

developments built in primarily minority-dominated areas, thus fostering racial segregation. The issue before the court was whether the Fair Housing Act allows lawsuits based on disparate-impact — that is, an allegation that a law or practice has a discriminatory effect, even if it wasn't based on a discriminatory purpose. In upholding the use of disparate-impact, Justice Kennedy affirmed that fair housing decisions could be considered based on "the consequences of an action rather than the actor's intent."

In today's split decision (5-4), the Supreme Court has handed down clear guidance about how lower courts should address the varying issues local developers of affordable housing encounter. In his majority decision, Justice Kennedy validated the importance of competing objectives in local communities, including rejuvenating a city core, addressing costs and traffic patterns, and preserving historic architecture. The Supreme Court has also made clear that the Fair Housing Act "does not decree a particular vision of urban development."

"An important cornerstone of federal housing law was reinforced today," said Patricia Salkin, chair of APA's Amicus Curiae Committee. "For the first time, the Supreme Court has provided clarity to planners on how disparate-impact analysis should be used."

"Although there will be healthy discussions about the difficulties that will

be involved as courts attempt to satisfy all of the competing objectives that the Supreme Court's guidance has validated, communities will be better off as a result of this decision," said John M. Baker, partner at Greene Espel, PLLP, and member of APA's Amicus Curiae Committee.

APA and the Housing Land Advocates filed an amicus brief on behalf of the respondent, urging the court to affirm the Federal Housing Authority's disparate-impact standard. In its brief, APA argued that "the costs of complying with FHA's disparate-impact standard have not proven to be unduly burdensome for planning and development professionals." The brief also emphasized that the disparate-impact framework is vital for ensuring transparency and inclusiveness remain part of the planning and development process.



Suburban counties, cont'd. from [pg. 1](#)

and proceeding through them seamless to their citizens and their business communities.

Nowhere has this been more challenging than in suburban counties which encompass and surround our major cities. Suburbs that witnessed incredible growth in the post – World War II era into the 1990's and now with new extensions of mass transit into these once bedroom communities, they are experiencing urbanization along those transit corridors. Adding to this challenge, are both aging infrastructure and aging and retiring work force of county planning, zoning and land use officials who when they leave will take with them the institutional memory of “how things work,” in the county.

Several such counties are looking to learn from the experiences of others as to what changes can and should be made to better serve both their citizens and their business communities. How best do you balance environmentally responsible growth with the sense of community especially where long established suburban neighborhoods find themselves desirable locations for more concentrated development? How do you transfer institutional memory to the new work force you seek to attract and hire? How do you make government bureaucracies more transparent and seamless to the public and business community you serve?

The following are some specific areas where your colleagues in counties across the nation are seeking your input as to best practices or case studies you have developed in your community in

response to these forces. In coordination with your new President, Megan Nelms, we are requesting any of you who have a best practice or case study in these areas to share to send them into her at MBL08@ccgov.net. This article has also been posted on our Linked In page at <https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=5064414> as a forum for hosting the discussion.

Sample Areas:

Breaking down or assuring smooth coordination between Organizational Silos

Land use programs typically involve many different entities such as environment, fire, building code, forestry, transportation, public works, which presents the challenge of avoiding silo disconnects. All strive for seamless process flows for the developer and the public. Are there any case studies or best practices of counties which have addressed this issue by either structural changes in county organization or effective cross-agency work flows? Or assigning a project manager or similar role that shepherds the project through the process?

Rewriting zoning ordinances

Many jurisdictions are functioning under zoning ordinances originally adopted decades ago (many from the 1960's), with scores of amendments over the years making navigation of the regulations and statutes extremely difficult.

Are there examples of best practices or case studies of how a large urban county went about undertaking a total rewrite of their zoning ordinances to bring them up to date? Or has performed a recent analysis and opted not to rewrite?

Proffers

Many jurisdictions have some form of proffers as a part of their zoning and land use programs. Is there a best practice in this area for effective, efficient and consistent use of proffers, or alternatives that provide equivalent public benefit with less uncertainty for applicants such as more effective use of impact assessments?

Effective and Efficient Service Delivery

Are there case studies, models or best practices that show how a county planning, zoning and land use agency is able to de-conflict for their customers overlapping or conflicting comments which are received from other agencies which are involved in the planning, zoning and land use processes? (Examples might include project managers, advocates or ombudsmen who facilitate the resolution of such conflicts where they occur?)

Load Leveling

Many jurisdictions use third party entities to help address fluctuations in work coming in. Are there any case studies, models or best practices for how counties use outside entities or other means to maintain response targets while work levels fluctuate?

[Cont'd. p.9](#)

Suburban counties, cont'd. from [pg. 8](#)

Are any roles (e.g. inspectors) more difficult to address than others?

Staff Incentives

In many county planning, zoning and land use programs there is little motivation for staff to work more efficiently. Are there any case studies, best practices in staff administration that provide effective incentives (particularly non-monetary incentives) that strengthen employee work performance?

Managing Change

Successful transformation efforts. As the nation's economy continues to recover and economic competitiveness amongst counties within a geographical region becomes more intense many local jurisdictions are looking into

reviewing and where necessary restructuring or reforming their existing planning, zoning and land use processes to make them more effective and efficient.

Are there any case studies or best practices on how to successfully manage change, successfully make such transformations?

Use of Enterprise Funds

Many counties have gone to either hybrid General Fund/Enterprise Funds or directly to Enterprise funds to operate their planning, zoning and land use programs. Are there any best practices or case studies of most effective funding mechanisms for these critical county programs? Recent

examples of jurisdictions that have implemented such a fund?

Comparisons of Fees

While this is largely only relevant on a regional basis, are there any fee comparison studies which might be available and helpful to a county in a major metropolitan area undergoing urbanization?

I am sure that in addition to the above, you in your community could add other areas where you would benefit from the experiences of others.

Let us know and look out in the future for an article about this endeavor!



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Upcoming Free Planning Webcast Series

Here's an updated list of the webcasts provided by the Planning Webcast Series Consortium: These webcasts are free and are accessed by going to http://ohioplanning.org/aws/APAOH/pt/sp/development_webcast

July 10 [EcoDistricts – Performance Based Urban Design](#) Urban Design & Preservation Division

An Ecodistrict strategy is an emerging planning process which incorporates environmental performance metrics to guide neighborhood growth with a social, environmental and economic priority. This panel session will present, in detail, two ecodistrict efforts: the Brewery Blocks in Portland, OR - a private sector driven redevelopment of a historic brewery district, and the SW Ecodistrict in Washington, DC - a federal agency driven redevelopment of a single use office district into a sustainable, mixed-use neighborhood.

July 17 [Tools to Visualize and Plan for Coastal Hazard Resilience](#) County Planning Division

A major challenge for U.S. coastal and Great Lakes communities is planning for the impacts of current and future flood hazards. Tools planners are using to address these challenges can be found online Digital Coast, which hosts free data along with the training and tools needed to turn that data into useful information. During the webinar easily accessible web-based products will be discussed as well as case studies of how they have been applied.

August 14 [Economic Development 101: Is Your Community Prospect Ready?](#) Economic Development Division

In this webinar you will learn what your community can do to prepare for, and land your next economic development prospect. It will cover the following items: (1) Current trends in Economic Development & Site Selection; (2) Understanding your target audience - What Prospects, Site Selection Consultants and other key players are looking for; (3) Understanding your product & target markets; (4) Before the prospect shows up – what can make your community competitive; and (5) The site visit and afterwards - practical pointers for closing the deal.

October 16 [APA's New Aging-in-Community Programs](#) Private Practice Division

Aging demographics challenge the shape of our policies, planning and physical environments. Planners play a key role in the provision of structures and services that support or hinder resident well-being, productivity, and prosperity. APA has developed a toolkit to help planners and public officials to address the unprecedented challenges of aging communities: a web portal of resources on 'Aging and Livable Communities'; A policy guide on Aging in Community; a multigenerational planning framework for decision-making; and a new Planning Advisory Service report, Planning Age-Supportive Communities, with practical guidance to help communities develop aging-supportive programs. Leading players share the back stories behind the documents.

October 2 [Big Data and Small Communities: Opportunities and Challenges](#) Idaho Chapter

Nowadays a wide variety of data from the US Census Bureau is easily accessible for anybody to use and it is relatively easy to create impressive looking maps and flowcharts. But how reliable is this data and can we really use it to inform planning decisions? This program will highlight some of the issues with the data especially with regard to liability, comparability and data aggregation. In addition, the program will briefly discuss why these issues are even more relevant when you use third party software.