



Notes from the 2009 National Conference of the American Planning Commission (APA) in Minneapolis

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Summary

Region 2 Planning Commission sent me to the 2009 American Planning Association Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This report is a summary of the sessions I attended. I hope it will be of some use to the various commissions, committees, and organizations I serve.

Sustainability and public involvement were important ideas interwoven into many of the sessions I attended. The need to think regionally while respecting local authority also became apparent during the conference. Finally, the ample sidewalks, pedestrian mall with bus access, elevated skyways with second floor retail, light rail line, and bus routes that serve Downtown Minneapolis illustrate the need for a multimodal system.

Planning for the arts and artists

The economic impact of the arts is huge! There is a crossover of benefits from nonprofit arts organizations, to the general community, and to the economy. Artists contribute to the local economy in a variety of ways:

- Through contributions to the export base of the community:
 - Directly through the art products and services local artists produce
 - Indirectly by the productiveness of the general workforce increased through the efforts of local artists
- Through the consumption of products and services by local artists
- Through the increased amenities provided by local artists

Different approaches to arts promotion

Local communities can promote the arts locally through the following efforts:

- Museums, performing arts centers, and other institutions
- Live/work spaces
- Artists' centers dispersed throughout the community

Most communities focus on the first approach (e.g., the Ella, the Potter Center, and the JSO in Jackson). Unfortunately, institutions are resource intensive and may lead to limited benefits due to an isolation from the general community. Accordingly, it is important to note that an investment in human capital is as important as investing in physical capital when it comes to the arts.

The creation of institutional live/work space, such as the Armory Arts Village, is one approach to fostering human capital, although isolation from the surrounding area and high costs are still issues. However, non-institutional live/work space can also be allowed in non-residential areas through local zoning. The following issues are pertinent:

- Allowed as a conditional use:
 - Limited to certain areas through overlay zones
 - Excluded from the general/heavy industrial districts
- Required work space should be at least 50% of the unit
- Underlying zoning still applies except for the following:
 - Additional parking requirements
 - Residential yard requirements
- A 'right to do business' waiver should be signed by the live/work residents

Artist's centers have been used in Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul and other metropolitan areas to improve the arts in those communities. Artists' centers are places "where artists can learn, network, give and receive feedback, exhibit, perform, and share space and equipment." The Hubert H. Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, has a wide variety of resources on the subject of artists' centers available at <http://www.hhh.umn.edu/projects/prie/aei.html>.

Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA)

Municipalities need to identify the gap between the cost of the services they provide to their residents and the resources available to pay for those services. Past and present land use decisions will effect future budgets. Unfortunately, most communities don't know the fiscal impacts of their decisions.

Municipal budgeting is primarily limited to revenue forecasting. Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) analyzes revenues and costs separately, providing a true picture of the community's overall economy. Expense forecasts are based upon maintaining a certain level of service. In other words:

FIA lets decision makers know if the cash flow to the public sector (revenue generated) associated with a development is enough to cover the public service and facility demands (costs) of the development.

FIA: another tool for sustainable development

FIAs can be useful for analyzing the following planning applications:

- Master plan scenarios
- rezoning requests
- Development proposals
- Annexations, 425 agreements, etc.
- Economic development proposals

Various approaches to conducting an FIA

The most common approach to FIA is to do nothing. The cost of doing nothing, however, deprives decision makers of the information they need to make fully informed decisions. On the other hand, the various approaches to conducting an FIA also have their own costs:

- Major projects
- All projects
- Provided by the developer (*issues of quality, consistency over time, fairness*):
 - In-house review
 - Outside review
- Conducted by the municipality:
 - Contract FIA (costs more)
 - Conduct in house (issues of competency and completeness)

All FIAs will delay projects and have costs associated for the developer and/or the municipality. FIAs conducted on behalf of the municipality by a contractor has the greatest cost although FIAs conducted in house are affected by staff competency. FIAs provided

by developers are affected by the varied quality of the analysis. This raises the issue of fairness.

Net benefits of projects

It is important to note that the net benefits of different types of projects depends upon local circumstances:

- Residential development may pay for itself
- Nonresidential development is not necessarily a cash cow

Accordingly, different methodologies are needed depending upon the local circumstances:

- Case study-marginal approach
 - Reflects fiscal reality
 - Dependent upon local levels of service
 - Available capacity triggers the staging of facilities
 - Reflects geographic differences
- The average cost approach
 - Focuses on per capita/employee
 - Doesn't consider available capacities
 - Uses average (current) costs
 - Budget in equilibrium

The case study-marginal approach is the best for city/countywide analysis, area/corridor plans, and planned unit developments. The average cost approach is best for small/medium scale developments and cost of land use studies


Options for funding the gap between needs and resources

There will always be gaps between community needs and available resources. The following are options for generating capital and operating funds:

- Impact fees
- Utility fees
- Wheel taxes (car registration)
- Special taxing authorities/districts (metro districts, tax increment financing, etc.)
- excise/development taxes (real estate transfers, fuels, etc.)
- jurisdictional revenue sharing
- Interim service fees

The Many Varieties of Form-Based Codes

Form is the organizing principle for merging design guidelines with zoning ordinances. The sections of a form-based code include the following:

- Objective**
- Regulating plan;
 - Transect zones (from extremely rural (T1) to extremely urban (T6));
 - Building type;
 - Frontage type; and
- 
- Subjective**
- Architectural guidelines.

Calibrating the code

The planning charette is the basis for establishing the code. The device allows for the stock elements of the ordinance to be calibrated for local circumstances. Field measurements such as the character of existing streets and alleys (lane widths, parking widths, sidewalks, etc.) are also used to calibrate the code (including differences from the norm). For example, aerial photos can be used to survey build-to-lines, building locations, street tree alignment and spacing, and the orientation of the garage to the home and the street or alley.

Approaches to implementation

Floating zones are created in the text of the ordinance, but not identified on the map until an area is rezoned. The new zoning is available as an option for the developer through planned unit developments, traditional neighborhood developments, etc. This approach removes the need for variances, allowing for the incremental adoption of the new ordinance. However, it can also lead to disconnected development. Accordingly, the complete replacement of the code with specific and precise plans allows for more connection. Codes are often hybrids of the two approaches.

Resources

There needs to be an educational component to the implementation of form-based codes:

- www.smartgrowthschool.com;
- www.newurbannews.com; and
- www.transect.org.

Addressing health through planning

Core topics

The process was not planner driven or a standalone activity. Rather it was aimed at anthropological change. Accordingly, the organic planning effort took advantage of the following:

- Physical activity and accessibility;
- Air and water quality;
- Climate change;
- Environmental and housing quality
- Food;
- Health facility access and mental health
- Noise;
- Safety; and
- Social capital.

Master plans

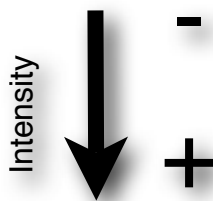
There are two approaches to integrating health into master plans:

- A separate chapter dedicated to health; or
- Health included as an issue in all plan chapters

Educational efforts related to health include:

- Special events;
- Research summaries;
- Information sheets;
- Case studies; and
- Health impact assessments.

Health impact assessment



There are several approaches to tailored for planners:

- Preliminary assessment (checklist);
- Significance (scope, size, etc.); and
- Thresholds for health;
- Rapid assessment (participatory workshop); or
- Threshold analysis (comprehensive).

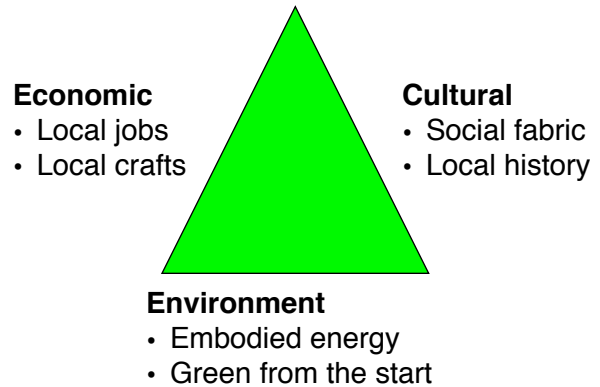
Resource

“Design for Health (DFH) is a collaborative project between the [University of Minnesota](#), [Cornell University](#), and the [University of Colorado](#) that serves to bridge the gap between the emerging research base on community design and healthy living and the everyday realities of local government planning” <http://designforhealth.net/>.

Historic Preservation

Sustainability: *a new argument supporting historic preservation*

Historic Preservation can be an important component of sustainable development. For example, historic structures and neighborhoods are steeped in the local culture and history. The preservation of those structures and neighborhoods enriches the social fabric of any community. The act of preservation can also support local crafts and lead to more local jobs per dollar spent than new construction. Finally, historic neighborhoods and structures are 'green' from the start given their embodied energy.



Embodied energy = the energy used to create a structure (e.g., its carbon footprint):

- The creation of the materials used in a structure;
- The transportation of those materials to the construction site;
- The assembly of the structure; and
- The maintenance and repair of the structure

For example, it is more sustainable to rehabilitate double-hung windows than it is to replace them. Most of the extra heat lost through an existing window is because of the frame. Fix that problem and the old windows are more efficient than new ones, the embodied energy is not lost, the preservation job enhances the local economy, and the social fabric of the structure and its neighborhood is preserved.

Historic preservation does not mean that new technologies are sacrificed. New technology can be successfully integrated into historic structures and neighborhoods if the proper sequence of new conservation principles are followed and embodied in local historic design guidelines:

- Maximize inherent sustainable qualities (e.g., thick walls, transom windows, etc.);
- Maintain building components in sound condition;
- Design landscapes to conserve resources; and
- Add new technologies sensitively

Unfortunately, many renovation projects jump directly to the final principal and are not performed in a sensitive manner.

Preserving the recent past: *a new approach?*

Post WW2 development will soon be eligible for preservation. Do the often mass-produced structures and auto-oriented neighborhoods and commercial developments built during the postwar period of growth deserve a new approach to preservation?

What about the one-of-a-kind structures built during the same period? Examples of postwar construction include:

- Residential development
- Gooogie commercial (e.g., space-age design, etc.)
- Modernist commercial (e.g., strip plazas)
- Iconic public facilities
- Custom-built homes

Structures, neighborhoods, and developments go through all the stages of historic recognition:

- Initial excitement;
- Growing comfortable with it;
- Aging (becoming commonplace);
- Deterioration and obsolescence;
- Movement to save the landmark;
- Valuing a neighborhood or context; and
- Recognition

Should a higher designation based on quality or other exemplary element be the path for postwar development? The vast amount of structures and the impact those numbers may have upon regulators is significant. It should also be noted that the preservation of postwar development may also be in conflict with contemporary planning practices. For example, should a street connectivity project be stopped in a subdivision because it violates the historic pattern of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets? There is no consensus at this time.

Character preservation may be an alternative to historic preservation. Character preservation allows for the regulation of forms rather than materials. This approach to preservation may allow for the limited review of structures and neighborhoods/districts from the postwar period.

Emerging trends:

The following links provide access to various trends:

- [Character Management Options for Design Review](#)
- [Defining District Character](#)
- [What are Design Guidelines for Historic Districts?](#)
- [Neighborhood Character: A Preservation Issue](#)
- [The Recent Past in Local Preservation Programs: A New Approach?](#)
- [Preservation and Sustainability: Current Planning Issues](#)

The presenter's notes can be found at: [Sustainability & Historic Preservation, APA 2009 National Conference](#)

Community Indicators

“In these days of scarce resources and community activism, information-based decision-making is becoming a crucial component of program management for governments and community-based organizations alike. Across the country, indicators have become a popular tool for tracking trends and measuring outcomes. Grantors and government budget offices rely on data in order to allocate resources in a way that best meets the community’s needs. Access to a centralized pool of data greatly eases research efforts for grant writers. Communities use indicators to benchmark themselves against other similar communities. Civic activists use indicator data to analyze trends and advocate for change in topics ranging from environmental health to neighborhood revitalization” (www.ewu.edu/groups/institutepubpol/CIIReportJuly2005.pdf).

Informing Our Nation: Improving How to Understand and Assess the USA’s Position and Progress (GAO-05-01), published by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) in November of 2004, “studied a diverse set of key indicator systems that provide economic, environmental, social and cultural information for local, state, or regional jurisdictions covering about 25 percent of the U.S. population—as well as several systems outside of the United States” (www.gao.gov/new.items/d051.pdf). An indicator is a quantitative measure that describes an economic, environmental, social, or cultural condition over time (e.g., the US Census, infant mortality, obesity, etc.)

Chelan Douglas Trends

Chelan and Douglas counties in Washington developed www.chelandouglastrends.org to compile the following sections (groupings) of information for the use of local decision makers, grant applicants, the media, and citizens:

- People;
- Culture and leisure;
- Economic vitality;
- Education;
- Environment;
- Health;
- Housing;
- Public safety; and
- Transportation.

Focus groups are to ascertain the data needed to populate and update most of the sections. The chairs of the focus groups comprise the steering committee which manage the website in collaboration with faculty and graduate students from Eastern Washington University (www.ewu.edu/x4901.xml), a nearby research institution. A “community report card” is issued on an annual basis.

Local application

Economic development groups (The Enterprise Group), the Community Action Agency, local governments, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and other entities in Region 2 compile and use information on a daily basis. Data compiled by a nonprofit may be of use to a local government and other data may be duplicated. There may be an opportunity for these disparate groups to work together. The website could be used as the information source for local comprehensive plans. The development of a community report card could also serve as a type of regional policy plan.

Leadership Dojo

Making ourselves effective leaders:

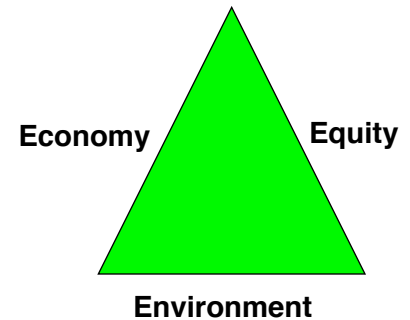
- Bring a positive attitude to the table (including humor)
- Stay cool under fire (don't become part of the blaze)
- Convey passion (high energy)
- Cultivate patience -- have the patience to suffer fools (let people have their say)
- Mentoring others to become leaders
- Constant learning
- Adapt to change
- Face confrontation honestly -- know when to avoid a fight (if someone pulls a gun)
- Recognize when someone does a good job
- Know when to leave (the job)
- Learn to work and trust others that are difficult to work with
- Clarity of purpose and trust -- the key to having and keeping a backbone
 - Trust others to do what they need to do
 - Have others trust you
 - Support others (don't sandbag or run away)
- Really listen -- don't turn off when someone is against something.
- Admit mistakes, face difficult issues, work on speaking skills, look people directly in the eye, answer the question if you can
- Keep your ethics (know and practice the AICP Code)
- Be wholesome -- stay fit, dress appropriately, etc.
- Be interested in people -- build relationships to be effective
- Delegate tasks -- built on relationships
- Give colleagues the opportunity to speak -- learn what you need to know
- Talk about 'we' rather than 'you'

Sustainable comprehensive plans

Sustainability: *defining it locally*

Sustainable comprehensive plans identify tangible ways to frame the impacts of the following national and/or international concerns at the local level, including:

- Deteriorating oil and food security;
- Climate change;
- Emerging water shortages;
- Natural systems under stress; and
- The growing divide between rich and poor



Sustainability is zero-sum: sustainable development should have no adverse impacts.

Cultivating Community: *A Plan for Union County's Future*

Union County, Pennsylvania, is a rural (forests and farmland) area, an hour north of Harrisburg. The plan incorporates the following factors into each of its chapters (elements) rather than treating sustainability as a separate issue:

- Sustainability principles:
 - Focus new development around and in established communities;
 - Preserve rural resources;
 - Conserve energy; and
 - Conserve fiscal resources; and
- Sustainability keys:
 - Natural and agricultural resources (various management and farmer education);
 - Mixed land use (growth boundaries and walkability);
 - Diverse housing (providing choices and green infrastructure);
 - Economic development (focusing programs on businesses that fit locally)
 - Transportation choices (reducing VMT, length of sidewalks, street connectivity)
 - Cultural, historic, and recreational resources (adaptive reuse, heritage tourism, etc.); and
 - Community facilities, utilities, and energy conservation (compact and efficient infrastructure systems and renewable energy).

The planning effort included some innovative attempts at public involvement:

- Use of local pep bands to increase attendance at public involvement events; and
- Meetings in a box (an exercise for people who could not attend an official public involvement event). *Another session I attended used a Trivial Pursuit based game to solicit public comments.*

The following link provide access to a website which provides information on public involvement, other issues, and the draft plan: <http://www.cultivatingcommunity.net/>.

Green Grand Rapids

The City of Grand Rapids addressed sustainability through Green Grand Rapids, an update (supplement) to its master plan. Many green initiatives, including the following, were included in the update:

- US Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement;
- Get the Lead Out Program (lead abatement);
- Improve access to parks and recreational amenities;
- Use 20% renewable energy in the City;
- LEED (green) certification for all city buildings;
- Use biodiesel in City vehicles;
- Regional biosolids program; and
- Community sustainability.

Challenges included in the Plan include less vacant land available for development and the downsizing of the local school district.

Green Grand Rapids components include:

- Parks and recreation;
- "Greening," improving the urban forest canopy;
- "Connections," alternatives to the automobile ("road diets" underway);
- Natural systems (ecological framework);
- Grand River (parks, river access, water quality protection);
- Use biodiesel in City vehicles; and
- Local food.

Green provisions implemented through the zoning ordinance include:

- Building placement;
- Wind and solar power;
- % of green space;
- Natural systems (ecological framework);
- Common gardens and farmers markets; and
- Sidewalks and bike paths.

However, implementation is challenged by limited general funding for local matches and maintenance.

Citizen engagement for the planning effort included a "Green Pursuits" game.

Green Grand Rapids is available online:

http://www.grand-rapids.mi.us/index.pl?page_id=8572.

Walkability

Recognizing the importance of walkability to the mobility and health of the residents of south-central Lower Michigan, I've included walkability as an element of local recreation plans tied to a goal in the local master plan (where possible). Louisville KY chose to address walkability through a multidisciplinary approach involving the local health and public works departments and transportation agency. That process culminated in Step Up Louisville, the Louisville Community Walkability Plan, which can be viewed online at (http://www.louisvilleky.gov/Health/MHHM/step_up_louisville/).

Themes of Step Up Louisville

The process was not planner driven or a standalone activity. Rather it was aimed at anthropological change. Accordingly, the organic planning effort took advantage of the following:

- Framed by sustainability;
- A focus on pedestrian safety and public health;
- Piggybacked on other local initiatives:
 - Multi-modalism; and
 - Connectivity (pointing to a need for change in local land use policy); and
- Community “grass roots” based:
 - Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement;
 - Bicycle and pedestrian summits;
 - Various workshops:
 - Safe-routes-to-school;
 - Disabilities and older folks; and
 - Walkers and joggers; and
 - Lots on media pieces (web included).

The following resource was also recommended:

AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities, 1st Edition: “The purpose of this guide is to provide guidance on the planning, design, and operation of pedestrian facilities along streets and highways. Specifically, the guide focuses on identifying effective measures for accommodating pedestrians on public rights-of-way. Appropriate methods for accommodating pedestrians, which vary among roadway and facility types, are described in this guide. The primary audiences for this manual are planners, roadway designers, and transportation engineers, whether at the state or local level, the majority of whom make decisions on a daily basis that affect pedestrians. This guide also recognizes the profound effect that land use planning and site design have on pedestrian mobility and addresses these topics as well” (https://bookstore.transportation.org/item_details.aspx?ID=119).