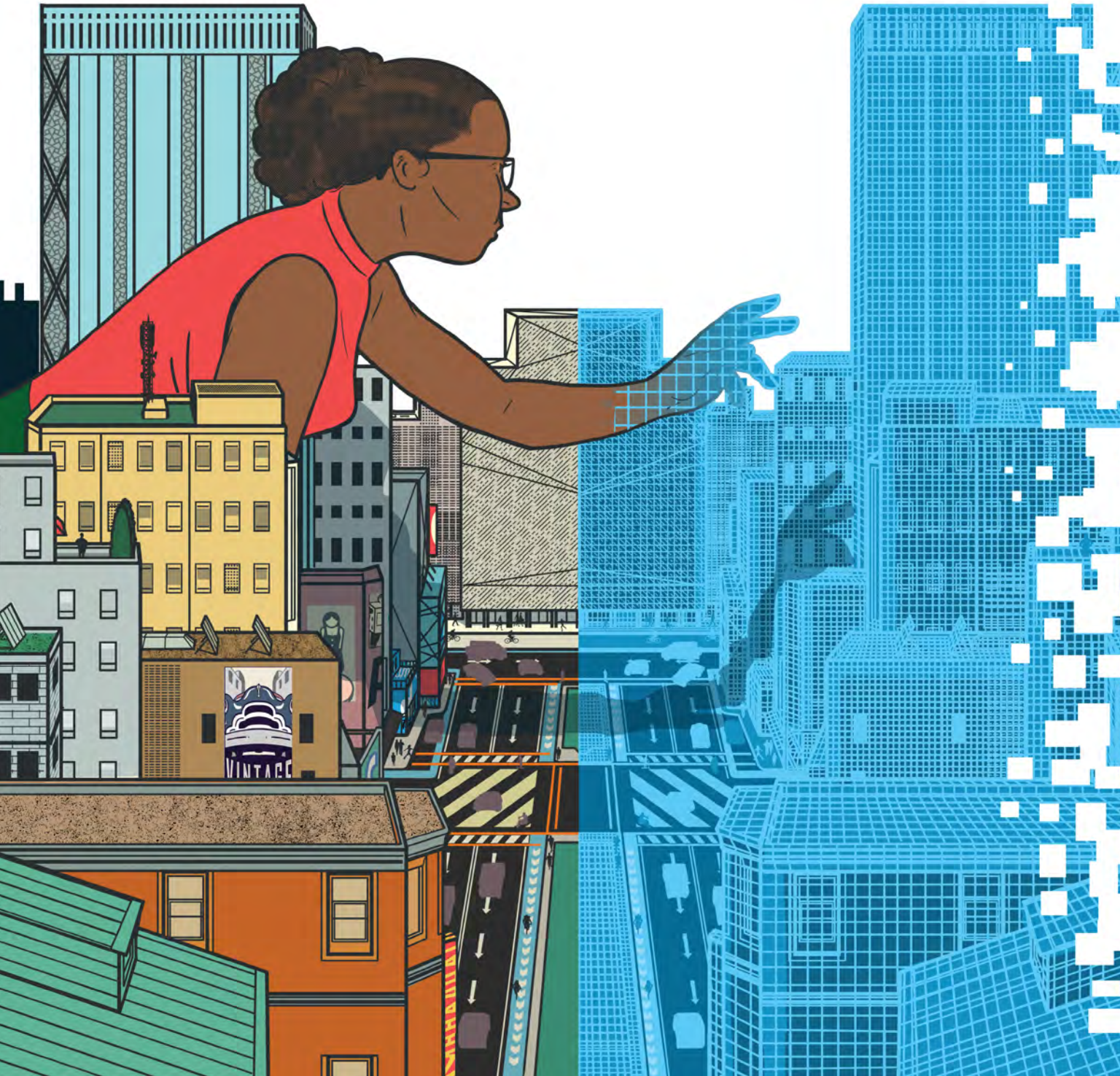


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Above: A yoga class in The Underline's Brickell Backyard in Miami.  
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## Contributors



### Jason Schneider

*Disruptor illustrations, cover*

A native of Toronto, this seasoned illustrator has experienced urban transformations for as long as he can remember. With a daughter whose future career as a planner is close at hand, he says creating the illustrations in this issue helped him further appreciate the intricacies of planning communities from the ground up.



### Wendie Kellington

*A Different Take on Housing the Homeless, page 18*

Advocacy has taught this Portland attorney that tackling homelessness requires an accessible program capable of providing immediate shelter and services to a diverse group of people. She says the only level of government able to tackle such a complex and pervasive social crisis is the federal government.



### Petra Hurtado Alexsandra Gomez

*Mirror Mirror, page 44*

Researcher Gomez is fascinated by how planners are embracing emerging trends in data and technology, something APA research director Hurtado says will be crucial to equitable and inclusive planning outcomes now and in the future.



# PLANNING

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#### APA Office

205 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601-5927 312.431.9100

#### APA National Advertising Representative

Rachel Barkin · Senior Sales Manager, The Townsend Group  
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FROM THE DESK OF APA'S NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIR

# A Call to Service in Times of Change

**P**LANNING IS ONE of the most civic-minded professions. We care about what is going on in our communities. Our job is about creating great communities for all. We would not have chosen this career if we did not believe in change and building prosperity. We want our communities to thrive.

Planning is built on a foundation of engagement, consensus, and equity. Far too often, we think of community only as a place, but it is so much more. Community is a feeling of fellowship, shared beliefs, interests, and goals. It is the friends we have made, the profession we have chosen, and the organizations to which we belong. The planning profession is a large and diverse community, and the American Planning Association brings us all together into one big tent.

Like every community, APA needs leaders who are committed to help carry out its mission. Members can participate in leadership in numerous ways, including volunteerism, appointed positions, or elected office within sections, chapters, divisions, and planning student organizations, as well as at the national level.

Over the last two years the current leadership of APA has developed a strategic plan that will guide the organization for years to come. It aims to prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion; promote the value of planning; provide future-oriented educational opportunities; and prepare us for a digital future.

We need individuals who will help drive these and future initiatives. Being a leader in APA is being part of change, which is extremely rewarding. But in addition to that good feeling of giving back to the profession, you will also be learning new things and



**‘Our goal is to build an exceptional and dedicated national leadership [and] to develop new and emerging leaders at all levels of APA.’**

—KURT CHRISTIANSEN

building a strong professional network of colleagues, many who turn into lifelong friends.

For some, the election process seems a little daunting. We question our experience, wonder if our network is large enough to gain votes, or doubt even whether we have enough time.

For these reasons, APA has reexamined its election process and removed barriers that might dissuade a member from serving in a leadership role. To that end, the governance, leadership development, and nominating committees reviewed the election guidelines to clarify expectations,

simplify nominating procedures, and expand diversity. Several of these changes will be part of this year’s election cycle.

Our goal is to build an exceptional and dedicated national leadership, to develop new and emerging leaders at all levels of APA, and ultimately make the profession and organization better. But we can only accomplish this by engaging the commitment of a diverse group of individuals who are willing to listen to many different perspectives, contribute their insights, and work together as a team.

That’s where you come in.

This summer, APA members will elect the newest slate of APA board and AICP commission members. The call to nominations will be open from March 15 to May 15, with balloting to take place in the summer. New leaders will assume office January 1, 2022.

Might your name be among those who will serve as stewards of our future? Go to [planning.org/elections](http://planning.org/elections) to nominate yourself and be a part of change in APA and the planning profession.

---

*Kurt Christiansen is chair of the APA Nominating Committee and APA’s immediate past president.*

## New online presence debuts this summer

IT'S BEEN A BUSY several months as *Planning* transitions to a digital-first approach, all the while cranking out content that helps you thrive in a rapidly changing world. We know this shift in delivery of your member magazine might mean some growing pains for you, but we think you're really going to like this next phase in the evolution of *Planning*. So, keep an eye out for a robust new online presence arriving this summer!

Thanks, as always, for reading, and thanks for engaging with the content (and one another). And, James, thanks for the idea on quick takeaways. Noted. Send your letters to Meghan Stromberg, editor in chief, at [mstromberg@planning.org](mailto:mstromberg@planning.org) or connect with us on social media @APA\_Planning, #PlanMag. Letters may be edited before publication.



### Bullish on buses

I enjoyed Dan Vock's recent article "Transit In Crisis" in the December 2020 issue of *Planning*. It portrays a clear and accurate picture of what we are facing these days. Like many, I am uncertain about the future of bus transit. However, as the piece suggests, there is some new hope for the Federal Transit Administration reentering the operating investment business and for the development of new, exciting, and creative models to address mobility needs.

I am as weary as most from the pandemic but certainly looking forward to being a part of what comes next—perhaps a renaissance for bus transit.

Doug Holcomb, AICP  
Chief Executive Officer  
Greater Bridgeport Transit  
Bridgeport, Connecticut



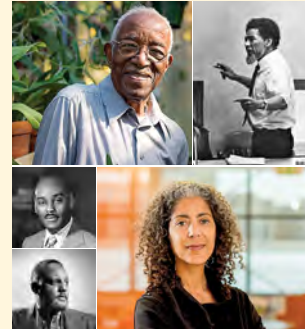
### Navigating disruptors

I enjoyed Meghan Stromberg's Perspectives, "Planning Magazine, for Today and Tomorrow," in the December 2020 issue. *Planning* and APA are doing commendable work in exploring trends and disruptors affecting the communities served by planners. I laud the magazine's digital-first approach and the decision to publish the magazine in print quarterly.

One suggestion to help planners digest and understand main articles in the publication: Add "quick-read" summaries to not only facilitate understanding but also to maintain and possibly build readership.

Keep up the great work!

James Pona, AICP  
James Pona and Associates  
St. Louis



### #PlanMag Gets Social

THE NEW YEAR launched our digital-first approach—and some lively conversations.

"11 Black Urbanists Every Planner Should Know" (bit.ly/blackurbanists), by author and planner **Pete Saunders**, focuses on some of the pioneers who have shaped our cities and the ways we understand them. @nydeeahtherealtor on Instagram was "thoroughly impressed and deeply moved" by their stories. "This is a good list," agreed @ruandamcf on Twitter, "but one non-traditional urbanist that should be included is **June Jordan**. Like so many, her contributions to thinking about the city were erased." @Corrie\_Parrish added, "I didn't know about **Dorothy Mae Richardson** and I'm from Pittsburgh. I will say though that there were only 2 women in this list and I found that disappointing. Black women helped shape US planning far more than what this article alludes to." To help us cover a more accurate planning canon, tweet your inspirations to @lindsaynieman.

### More on better streets

In response to Sara Bronin’s Legal Lessons, “A Case for Better Street Design” (*Planning*, Winter), there may be more of a silver lining than the author suggests.

For example, New York City DOT’s Street Design Manual is intended to supplement rather than replace existing engineering and environmental standards and requirements including the Federal Highway Administration’s *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways* and AASHTO’s *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets* (Green Book), which the author mentions.

Other examples exist and are included in APA’s *Planning and Urban Design Standards* (Wiley, 2006) which has 80 pages dealing with



Main Street in Leavenworth, Washington, was closed to traffic in May 2020.

“Transportation,” including such forward-looking topics as sidewalks, traffic calming, and pedestrian friendly streets to name just a few.

That said, I offer two cautions:

1. **THE U.S.** and its interstate highway legacy are unique among other cities in the world that have the pre-automobile historical experiences of more walkable places. However, we are making major gains by promoting more pedestrian-focused and bikeable spaces that sustain and encourage transit-oriented villages or sections of urban places; and

2. **WHEN I PRACTICED** and taught transportation planning, we always made sure there was still space for other modes so that congestion would not be exacerbated. The idea of a sidewalk café and sipping wine on cobblestoned streets is very romantic but may not always be appropriate or easy to implement!

Dr. Floyd Lapp, FAICP, DPA  
New City, New York



## RESEARCH MAKES PLANNING POSSIBLE

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As of February, vaccination rates in some of New York City's wealthier zip codes were up to eight times higher than in parts of predominantly Black neighborhoods.

JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

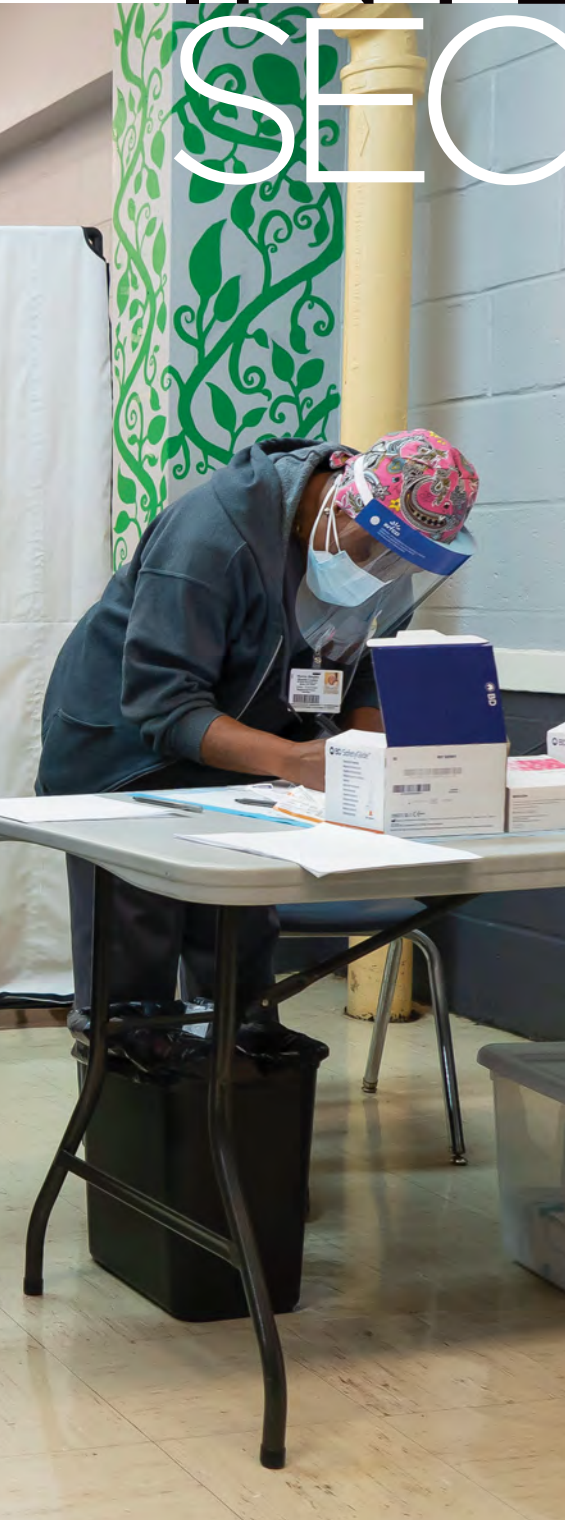




# INTERSECTIONS

WHERE PLANNING AND THE WORLD MEET

Public Health | Housing | Et cetera | Viewpoint



PUBLIC HEALTH

## On the Road to Vaccination, Transportation Is Key

*For some groups, lack of transportation—not vaccine availability—is the biggest barrier to getting vaccinated against COVID-19. By Jenni Bergal*

**W**HILE STATE and local governments have been busy planning for and distributing COVID-19 vaccines, many have left out an important piece: how to provide transportation to people who can't get to those sites.

Millions of older adults and low-income people of color who are at higher risk of contracting the virus don't have cars, don't drive, or don't live near public transit. Some are homebound. Some live in rural areas far from vaccination sites.

The vaccine rollout largely has been left to state and local governments, which are busy trying to keep up with heavy demand and short supply. While transportation hasn't been a priority, some areas, from New York City to Spokane, Washington, have come up with different ways to address the problem.

### The homebound

One of the biggest challenges for state and local officials is getting vaccines to homebound older adults, says Steven Albert, chair of University of Pittsburgh Graduate

School of Public Health's department of behavioral and community health sciences.

"This is an invisible population. They're not like long-term care residents in nursing homes," Albert says. "They are very elderly and frail and they live at home and are an afterthought, in some cases."

Some organizations that offer services to older adults are helping to bring vaccines to those who are homebound or to find transportation to vaccine clinics.

"Transportation is just critical to this," says Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

In central Indiana, for example, an area agency has been reaching out to older adults to help them receive vaccines in their homes or to locate transportation to take them to vaccine sites.

And the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources is working with transportation providers and volunteer drivers, some of whom have been vaccinated, to bring older adults to vaccination appointments, according to Markwood.

“I know everyone is struggling to do their best,” Markwood says, “but right now, there needs to be a realization that when you’re looking to serve older adults and people with disabilities there needs to be a level of support there, and without planning, it won’t happen.”

**Poor, rural communities**

Vaccine transportation is also a problem for low-income communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by the virus.

The private ride-sharing sector is offering some assistance. Uber announced in December a partnership with the National Urban League and other groups in which it will offer 10 million free or discounted rides to communities of color.

Lyft joined with corporate partners and nonprofit groups in December to launch a program that would provide 60 million rides to and from vaccination sites for members of low-income, uninsured, and at-risk communities.

Officials in some communities are considering using churches, schools, and grocery stores as places where residents can get vaccinated.

In New Orleans, city council member Cyndi Nguyen put together a task force that includes health and social services providers and community and faith-based leaders to map out a plan for her district, which includes the Lower Ninth Ward, a low-income Black

neighborhood that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

In rural areas, some residents also are facing serious challenges getting to vaccine sites, which are often far away.

Even if state and local governments can make vaccines available at pharmacies, federally



In December, Lyft joined a corporate partnership to provide free rides to vaccination sites for low-income and at-risk people.

qualified health centers, hospitals, and rural health clinics, lots of residents don’t live near one.

A December study by the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy and the nonprofit West Health Policy Center found that 35 percent of U.S. counties have two or fewer such facilities per 10,000 residents.

**Some solutions**

While transportation hasn’t been a priority, some areas have come up with ways to get people to vaccines—or vaccines to people.

New York City has launched a program for residents age 65 and over who have made a vaccine appointment at a city-operated site but don’t have transportation. Staffers direct them to paratransit,

ambulette, and taxi ride-hailing services. Some senior center programs also will provide transportation. City officials say they’ll be able to offer about 10,000 rides a week.

In Miami Beach, fire rescue workers administered vaccinations last month at affordable senior housing buildings and the homes of homebound older adults. So far, they have vaccinated more than 900 older adults, and they plan to continue if they can get more vaccines, according to city spokesperson Melissa Berthier.

In Franklin County, Ohio, the Office on Aging last month provided free transportation to people 75 and older who had a vaccine appointment.

In Washington State, Spokane Transit is giving older adults door-to-door paratransit rides to their appointments at a mass vaccination site. The cost: \$2 one way or \$4 round trip for those who don’t have a paratransit bus card.

In Austin, Texas, the regional public transit system, Capitol Metro, will send a wheelchair-accessible paratransit van to pick up and bring home vaccine patients, said Dottie Watkins, the chief operating officer.

“Anyone in the public is able to use it, but our focus is supporting our lower-income and elderly community,” she said. “Our goal is to make sure that transportation is not a barrier to people getting their vaccine.”

*Jenni Bergal is a staff writer for Stateline (pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline). This story was reprinted with permission from Stateline, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts.*

HOUSING

## Massachusetts Makes Way for Zoning Reform

*New legislation encourages regional housing production, density, and smart growth. By Isabela Dorneles and Lindsay Nieman*

**M**ASSACHUSETTS has some of the highest housing prices in the country. According to the state's current administration, that's due in part to inadequate housing production.

Some robust new economic development legislation aims to change that. An Act Enabling Partnerships for Growth (H. 5250), which was signed into law by Governor Charlie Baker in January, includes provisions for the first substantive changes to the state's zoning act since 1975.

Effective immediately, the law offers a variety of new tools designed to create more diverse housing types. Among its many provisions, the Housing Choice component changes voting majority requirements, provides for special permitting, and allows for decreases in parking requirements, all of which promote and increase opportunities for more mixed-use development, multifamily housing, and accessory dwelling units.

The law also includes a smart growth zoning incentive known as Chapter 40R, which rewards towns that allow mixed-use and multifamily zoning.

"I think what the Housing Choice provision is going to do is help municipalities plan on their own terms for multifamily, for ADUs," says Kristina Johnson, AICB, director of planning

and community development in Hudson, Massachusetts, and president of the Massachusetts Association of Planning Directors. "And it does so by relaxing a lot of the strict zoning requirements that we have in place."

### Building momentum

In Boston, routinely one of the most expensive cities in the U.S., the new changes could "facilitate the development of more housing units that are so desperately needed," Johnson says.

They also build on other recent pro-housing efforts in Boston, including the folding of federal Affirmative Furthering Fair Housing requirements into the city's zoning code, making it the largest yet to do so. The amendment, which was approved in December, requires that all proposed developments be specifically reviewed to mitigate their impact on resident groups historically targeted by discrimination.

And in February, Walsh dedicated over \$34 million in funding from the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Neighborhood Housing Trust, and the Community Preservation Fund to 841 new affordable housing units in nine neighborhoods across the city.

*Isabela Dorneles is APA's state government affairs consultant. Lindsay Nieman is Planning's associate editor.*

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## INTER SECTIONS

Public Health  
Housing  
**Et cetera**  
Viewpoint



### TO READ **ON JUST CITIES**

The Harvard Graduate School of Design's Just Cities Lab asked 26 urban designers, artists, activists, doctors, mayors, ecologists, and philanthropists to answer two pressing questions: What does a just city look like, and how can we start creating them? The result is a fascinating, inspiring, and challenging collection of essays about 22 cities on five continents. Read the series at [bit.ly/justcity](https://bit.ly/justcity).

### TOOLKIT **ALL-AGES BIKING**

*50+ Cycling Survey Databook 2020*, the new resource from dbiTilde Collaborative, uses survey responses to assess what older cyclists need now and in the future. Go to [bit.ly/50pluscycling](https://bit.ly/50pluscycling) to learn how your community can better support all-ages biking.



NOW STREAMING

## Accounting for the Human Factor

Residents attempt to free a vehicle caught in the locally dubbed “car trap” in *Traffic Separating Device*.

**T**RAFFIC *Separating Device*, a quirky, 14-minute documentary from director Johan Palmgren, captures what happens when Stockholm’s city council votes to install a “spårviddshinder,” a device embedded in the middle of a busy street that allows buses, but not cars, to use a specific lane—or, as described by one of the locals, a “car trap.”

Along the way, there are more than a few flat tires and broken axles, and one missed ferry ride leading to an aborted birthday party. It’s humorous and light,

but planners will recognize and identify with the real-world challenges presented by a well-intentioned traffic solution that goes horribly off-road.

In the end, the experiment delivers an important lesson: Even the simplest urban planning interventions need to account for “the human factor.” Watch it now for free via PBS or American Documentary.

*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.*

PLANNERS PLAYLIST

### THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE



The monthly podcast *Future Cities* has one overarching theme: urban resilience. Through its survey of ongoing research, cutting-edge projects, and storytelling from a wide variety of perspectives, the show identifies existing and emerging best practices in resilience—all while giving the field a broader, more comprehensive definition that better fits our needs and challenges today.

VIEWPOINT

# Lessons from Oregon's Historic Wildfire Season

**I F SOMEONE TOLD ME** I'd spend part of 2020 masked and door-knocking in a pandemic, carrying my inhaler to combat smoke irritation, I would have thought that sounded like a dystopian novel. Yet that's my memory of September: delivering meals to people taking refuge at the Graduate Hotel in Eugene, Oregon, after the Holiday Farm wildfire forced them from their homes.

In the past year, we've seen historic damage from wildfires across the world. These disasters have reinforced that planning for and with environmental refugees is no far-off challenge. It's here, and it's now. With the compounding national pressures of a pandemic, an economic recession, and a shortage of affordable housing stock, displacement will only continue to strain the ability of many to maintain stability, particularly in communities our society has long disenfranchised because of their race, class, or ability.

Responding to these pressures will be an immense job—but it is also an invitation to drastically reimagine who we are as planners in the Anthropocene. Just as we must adapt to our new climate, the way we serve our communities must change, too. Specifically, we need more structures through which to strategically pair planners' skills with local needs beyond the typical fee-for-service construct, particularly after a disaster. By working in a pro bono capacity, planners can help build a more just template for recovery, where limited access to capital does not preclude access to planning and design services.

Coming off my weekends volunteering and supporting mutual aid efforts, I felt lost as to how to move beyond triage and sustain momentum toward long-term recovery. I soon found a place in the Holiday Farm Advisory Committee,



**'By working in a pro bono capacity, planners can help build a more just template for recovery, where limited access to capital does not preclude access to planning and design services.'**

— KELSEY ZLEVOR

a local volunteer coalition of planners, landscape architects, engineers, and professors. Our work is only just beginning, but we're currently teaming with leaders of the McKenzie Community Development Corporation to find ways to help reestablish communities impacted by the wildfires.

This group highlights the professional response needed at local levels, especially from private practitioners and academia, to help support communities on their self-determined road to recovery and resiliency. Luckily, we aren't alone. Many small towns across the U.S. have formed similar systems for providing professional aid in the wake of increasing disaster.

I hope these responses become a movement and are indicative of a new era of radical grassroots planning. One that is grounded in collaborative activism, prioritizes the most vulnerable in the face of climate change, seeks to build systems of support beyond fee-for-service structures. One that honors and incorporates Indigenous knowledge for stewarding the land we occupy, and acknowledges that everyday land-use action is climate action, because where and how we develop land impacts community resiliency—and can redress past harm.

I am neither a refugee, nor a climate change expert. But I am a planner who has entered a profession with a weighty inheritance: the moral imperative to root social justice and climate activism into the bedrock of our profession in the post-2020 world. We must ask ourselves what we can give, and how we can get started.

---

*Kelsey Zlevor (she/her) is a planning consultant at Cameron McCarthy Landscape Architecture and Planning. She is also an appointed member of the City of Eugene Sustainability Commission.*

*Viewpoint is Planning's op-ed column. The views expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine or the American Planning Association. Please send column ideas to Lindsay R. Nieman, Planning's associate editor, at [lnieman@planning.org](mailto:lnieman@planning.org).*

The vibrant Castro “gayborhood” in San Francisco, adjacent to the Victorian mansions of the Liberty Hill Historic District, was designated a LGBTQ cultural district in 2019.  
WENBIN/ISTOCK UNRELEASED



# TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

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Planners Library



JAPA TAKEAWAY

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Understanding the link between same-sex households and historic districts can help planners manage gentrification.

By Dr. Kelly L. Kinahan, AICP, and Dr. Matthew H. Ruther

**A**LTHOUGH HISTORIC districts are a common means of preserving the built environment, we actually know very little about the implications of this preservation planning tool beyond its positive relationship to property values. Historical narratives have developed connections between the LGBTQ community and historic preservation, for example, but very little is known about the who, what, and why behind it.

A more robust understanding of how preservation tools relate to neighborhood change—particularly among sexual, racial, and ethnic minority communities—can help planners as they grapple with the potentially negative effects of gentrification and displacement that could result from historic district designation.

In a recent *Journal of the American Planning Association* article, we investigated the relationship between locally designated and National Register historic districts, and demographic, socioeconomic,

and housing changes in 46 U.S. cities. Our research specifically focused on unmarried partnered same-sex households (UPSSHs), racial and ethnic subgroups, and median household income.

In this column, we share some key findings that will help practicing planners understand trends associated with historic preservation efforts and pinpoint interventions needed in historic districts to mitigate potentially negative outcomes for these demographic groups.

### **TAKEAWAY 1: Historic districts may help foster and grow the presence of same-sex households.**

Admittedly, because of a lack of reliable national data on UPSSHs before 2000, we were unable to fully parse the causality question of whether historic districts lead to more UPSSHs or vice versa.

However, our analysis of data from the 1990s through 2010 does suggest that when historic districts are in place, significant growth in UPSSHs follows.

In historic districts created between 1990 and 1999, we found small but significant growth (0.2 percentage point) in the share of male UPSSHs between 2000 and 2010, even after controlling other demographic, socioeconomic, and housing factors that might account for the change. The fact that this growth was not reflected in historical districts established in the '70s and '80s suggests the relationship between historic districts and UPSSHs is more immediate and not cumulative over time.

For planners, this indicates that historic districts can help maintain and grow the presence of UPSSHs. This suggests planners concerned with protecting queer spaces should consider incorporating preservation-based approaches, including establishing local and National Register historic districts to preserve these spaces.

It's important at this point to note that our research findings are specific to UPSSHs, particularly male households, which is just one segment of a richly diverse group. While our findings support the theories in the literature that connect gay men and preservation, this does not mean that other subsets within the LGBTQ community do not participate in historic preservation. Recent work such as *Preservation and Place: Historic preservation by and of LGBTQ Communities in the United States* highlights these contributions.

**TAKEAWAY 2: All preservation planning efforts should be inclusive of LGBTQ perspectives.**

While we were unable to categorically say that historic districts lead to more UPSSHs, we were able to determine the

inverse: whether the presence of male UPSSHs increases the likelihood of locally designated historic districts. In brief, it does.

We also found that tracts with initial higher shares of UPSSHs were more likely to establish locally designated his-

toric districts (the same wasn't true for National Register designations).

This could suggest that male UPSSHs are key actors in the creation of locally designated historic districts, which aligns with the theory that gay men use historic preservation tools to demarcate space and power. Locally designated historic districts

offer a more direct means of land control through the regulations outlined within the ordinances that govern changes to the district's built environment, which differ from NRHDs' mostly honorific status.

Because UPSSHs are concentrated within historic districts, it is important to call out that these spaces may contain other institutions and commercial establishments that are important to the broader LGBTQ community, beyond gay male households.

For preservation planners, this may present an opportunity to reevaluate existing locally designated districts and NRHDs from an explicitly queer perspective to identify and document the social history and cultural heritage aspects, which are missing from even some of the most well-known gayborhoods.

This type of systematic reexamination should happen in collaboration not

only with residents of existing historic districts, but also with the larger queer community. Because "the invention of meaning for historic districts is an ongoing process," as put by the late scholar David Allan Hamer, using a queer lens to revisit designated districts could shift "district boundaries and determinations about which places constitute contributing elements."

Planners should work with neighborhood residents to ensure all LGBTQ social histories and those of other historically marginalized groups are included in the significance statements for new historic district designations where appropriate.

**TAKEAWAY 3: Historic designation tends to displace racial and ethnic subgroups over time.**

Overall, historic districts do not appear to have a long-term relationship with changes in UPSSHs. (Please note that our data does not capture more vulnerable persons within the LGBTQ community, such as transgender and bisexual people, who are more susceptible to neighborhood change pressures like rising housing costs.)

However, the same does not hold for Black and Hispanic populations or median income levels. Declines in the shares of Black and Hispanic residents from 2000 to 2010 are significantly related to historic districts

established more than 10 years earlier. For example, in neighborhoods where a local historic district was created between 1980 and 1990, the share of the Black population declined by approximately 2.5 percentage points, on average, between 2000 and 2010.

Local historic districts established in 1980 or earlier were also related to

Planners concerned with protecting queer spaces should consider incorporating preservation-based approaches.

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growth in median household income from 2000 to 2010 by approximately 1.9 percentage points, on average. Interestingly, more recently established districts were not significantly related to median household income change from 2000 to 2010. This suggests that historic district designation may be associated with different types of demographic, socioeconomic, and housing changes over the short, medium, and long terms.

Like historic districts, higher shares of UPSSHS are also related to losses of minority race/ethnicity subgroups, along with rising median household incomes. Taken together, these results imply that planners and preservationists should more directly and proactively engage the potentially negative outcomes that may result from historic districting and understand how outcomes may vary over time, particularly decreases of racial and ethnic subgroups in these neighborhoods. Specifically, planners should consider ways in which the local historic districting process can help mitigate negative neighborhood change outcomes for vulnerable subgroups.

For instance, planners could argue for considering elements like the mix of housing tenure or affordability as historically significant features of a neighborhood worthy of protection through local historic district ordinances. Planners and preservationists could then work together to implement strategies that preserve existing or create new affordable housing when historic districts are designated, as well as ensure the maintenance of this housing over time.

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*Kelly L. Kinahan is an assistant professor and Matthew H. Ruther is an associate professor, both in the Department of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. They are the authors of "Uncovering the Relationship Between Historic Districts and Same-Sex Households" (May 2020), originally published in JAPA.*



In Missoula, Montana, city staff created an outreach event under a park pavilion, with dot exercises, community image surveys, masked conversations, and questionnaires.

#### HOW-TO

## 4 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT

With warmer weather coming and COVID-19 precautions still in place, it may be time to take outreach efforts outside. *By Meghan Stromberg*

**IF THIS SPRING** is like last summer and fall, outdoor spaces will be buzzing with people seeking out safe places to socialize. What better opportunity to safely engage community members on local planning efforts?

Even with widespread vaccination, mask-wearing, providing hand sanitizer, and keeping a safe distance will remain important. Here are some other tips to make the most of outdoor engagement events.

**1. SMALLER CAN BE BETTER.** Projecting your voice through a mask only works among a handful of people, says Kathleen Duffy, AICB, associate planner with Smith Group, who learned that tidbit

during a walking tour last summer. She notes that otherwise “these [tours] aren’t that different from pre-COVID, where we’d walk around with stakeholders. We’ve even done tours in the snow.” Smaller events can also be easier to manage, particularly when it comes to everyone following mask-wearing rules and remaining physically distant.

**2. LOW-TECH MIGHT BE THE BEST TECH.** “You always learn things in public meetings,” says Erin Moriarty, planner and project manager at ms consultants in Columbus, Ohio. The lesson her team learned? “A large screen always catches the wind.” They held an event at an outdoor amphitheater

in Youngstown to launch a river corridor planning effort. Officials from 13 participating communities attended. Besides the wind-impacted PowerPoint, they also displayed “low-tech” maps and other materials on standard tack boards and brought printed handouts.

**3. BE FLEXIBLE.** Last September, the Maryland Recreation & Parks Association hosted its first-ever Ride for Social Justice & Racial Equity to raise money for park program scholarships for people of color, especially kids. In her area, organizers expected about 40 cyclists, says Natali Fani-Gonzalez, vice chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board. Double that amount signed up, so they pivoted, distributing the event’s neon yellow shirts at neighborhood sites and encouraging riders to create their own routes to avoid overcrowding on the planned 11-mile main route. As a result, riders of all ages, ethnicities, and abilities were seen in their vibrant shirts all over the county, she says.

**4. AUGMENT A VIRTUAL EVENT WITH AN IN-PERSON ONE.** Jason King, CNU, has hosted several virtual design charrettes since the pandemic began. The principal and senior project director of Dover, Kohl & Partners likes to pair those online events with a live, on-site component hosted by partner municipal planners.

“Virtual alone feels insufficient to reach the people who are actually affected,” he says. That was the case in Crystal River, Florida, where an in-person workshop greatly expanded participation in an Black community with limited internet access.

There are added benefits to this approach, King says, including building local planners’ capacity and visibility in major projects.

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*Meghan Stromberg is APA’s editor in chief.*



The Conestoga Hut Micro-Shelter is one quick, temporary shelter option, offering 60 square feet of interior space and an insulated floor, walls, and roof.

LEGAL LESSONS

## A DIFFERENT TAKE ON HOUSING THE HOMELESS

We have tried traditional fixes. It’s time to think outside the regulatory box to solve the U.S. homelessness crisis. *By Wendie L. Kellington*

**A**S MOST PLANNERS know, solutions to homelessness are complex, expensive, often uncomfortable, and—to date—mostly politically impossible. Local governments have futilely tried criminalizing it and spent staggering amounts of money to build stick housing in too few numbers.

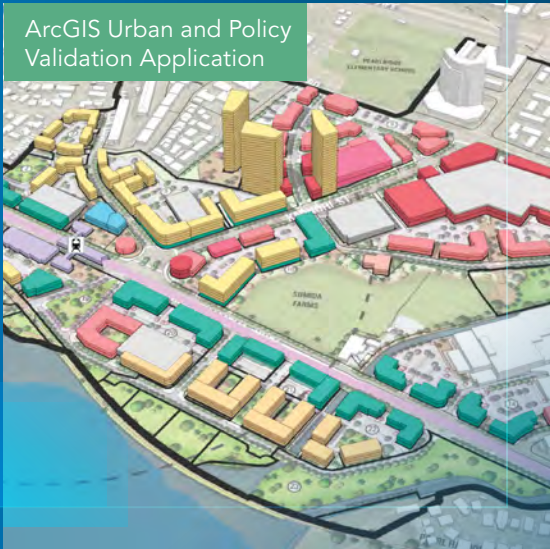
Indeed, many state and local governments presume constructing free or low-income brick-and-mortar housing is their only long-term option. In reality, they cannot build enough to solve the problem. But even if they could, formidable political opposition often means public or low-income housing

is concentrated in areas already occupied by the politically ignored, resulting in blight, social disconnection, and treatment failures.

Moreover, apart from prohibitive cost of stick housing, significant parts of the homeless population suffer from mental illnesses and drug addictions and cannot qualify for traditional housing. Others are quickly kicked out of public or subsidized housing for rule violations. Some simply refuse traditional housing even if it is offered.

So the cycle continues. Unhoused children are often raised without a stable education, in environments that risk personal harm and disconnection

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from society. Parents often do not know where to go for help and are frightened to reach out for fear of losing their children. Access to services is Byzantine and, at best, results in long waiting lists and delays. Even though research demonstrates that social services must meet unhoused people where they are, we quixotically demand they find and unravel the complex web of services.

Moreover, if a person who is unhoused manages to connect with help, we expect them to keep appointments, potentially without the resources that make that possible: transportation, a cell phone or the means to charge one, calendars, or maybe even the skills to manage it. And when resources do become available, it is also often impossible to reliably reach them. The result is predictably Sisyphean. And amid job losses and evictions, the pandemic is only compounding the problem.

It is time to approach the issue of homelessness differently and accept a new toolbox, with a focus on federal, state, and local policy shifts that promote small transitional communities of nontraditional housing types such as tents, RVs, Quonset huts, tipis, and tiny houses.

### The case for federal leadership

When the Great Depression's "Hoover-villes"—shanty towns composed of people who had lost everything—dotted the nation in alarming size and number, dozens of federal New Deal programs were created to support their inhabitants. Likewise, today's federal government can and must play a leadership role in ending homelessness now.

Guided by experts, the federal government could adopt a mandate that every city establish and maintain its proportional share of immediately available housing within a particular time frame. Such a mandate would need to come with increased federal

funding, beyond what is already allocated to homelessness. Federal law would need to require that all housing types, like tents, RVs, Quonset huts, tipis, and tiny houses, be allowed.

Such transitional housing types are relatively inexpensive, can be established immediately, and would be far safer, humane, and effective than sweep and tow programs; hoping to build enough traditional housing; or doing nothing.

Unfortunately, current land-use and building codes make these modalities illusory. That's where local communities come in.

Communities would be responsible for deciding what their proportional share would look like and where it would be sited, but if they did not establish it in the mandated time, the federal government would step in and do it for them.

Federal experts could also establish minimum characteristics for the housing options, like utility offerings and hygiene, refrigeration, food, storage, and laundry facilities, either on-site or in trucks. Each community could be composed of no more than 150 residents (the suggested number of people who can live together and maintain stable relationships). Federal law could also require that facilities be distributed throughout the community to avoid concentration of public housing, which has been shown to isolate and disadvantage already burdened populations.

Once communities establish housing for their proportion of homeless people, it could then be made illegal to camp in unsanctioned public places—and it would actually be enforceable (see "Homeless in Public," *Planning*, February 2020: [bit.ly/3uj11GZ](https://bit.ly/3uj11GZ)).

### Planners' role

A strong federal program within which planners can work is our best shot at solving our modern-day Hooverville crisis. But while we wait for the federal government to step up, planners are uniquely qualified to set their communities on this path.

Planners can be a key part of the solution, working with elected officials, social scientists, and other experts to figure out transitional housing options

to solve individual communities' problems. For example, they could identify locations for transitional housing enclaves, keeping in mind the population to be served, such as unhoused families with children needing to be near better schools, as well as ensuring via written rules that enclaves are not concentrated. Planners could mitigate the political

acceptability "buffers" around targeted locations, as well as ensure enclaves are safe and reasonably attractive to counter unfortunate but expected NIMBY push-back. They could also identify the suite of transitional housing types and related facilities to best meet their homeless communities' needs.

But first and—at this stage—foremost, planners are in a position to help start these conversations with elected officials and fellow public servants. After all, solving the national crisis of homelessness requires strong leadership at all levels of government. And let's not forget: Planners know how to create great communities.

It is time to accept a new toolbox, with a focus on nontraditional housing types such as tents, RVs, Quonset huts, tipis, and tiny houses.

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*Wendie L. Kellington, principal at the Kellington Law Group PC, is an Oregon attorney who has spent the past 38 years practicing land-use law, working closely with planners at all levels of government and private industry.*

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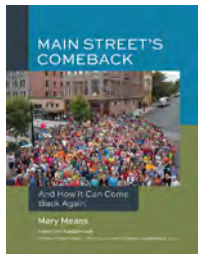
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# MAIN STREETS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

A strong foundation of local resources will help them recover from the effects of COVID-19. *By Julie Von Bergen*



**Main Street's Comeback—And How It Can Come Back Again**

*By Mary Means*, 2021, Hammondwood Press, 112 pp.; \$30 paper, \$9.99 e-book  
Order the book from your main street bookstore or at [bit.ly/3rKaNzH](http://bit.ly/3rKaNzH)

**M**ARY MEANS IS widely known for leading the team that created the National Main Street Center. More than 1,600 towns and historic neighborhood corridors in 40-plus states have successfully used the Main Street approach, often called the most effective economic development program in America. Her new book tells the stories of how citizens, small business owners, and civic leaders in hundreds of towns and city neighborhood corridors brought life back to the heart of their communities—and how they can emerge strongly from the COVID-19 pandemic. Means received the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2020 Louise du Pont Crowninshield Award. Read the full interview at [planning.org/planning](http://planning.org/planning).



about outdoor eating and selling, or zoning that disallows business uses in homes, or land-use policies that tilt toward outlying chain store development. Our Zoom lives have proven that quality internet access is essential infrastructure. Savvy states and municipalities are actively

actively taking steps to fill gaps in service.

**PLANNING: How can equity, inclusion, and resilience be built into a town's recovery efforts?**

**MEANS:** The pandemic has painfully revealed widespread inequality. Last summer's powerful worldwide marches for racial justice even reached the nation's small towns. Main Street organizations are proactively reaching

**Q&A**

out to help minority entrepreneurs gain access to financing and mentoring. Baltimore's Downtown Partnership recently announced an initiative that will provide robust technical, financial, permitting, and legal services.

**PLANNING: How will Main Streets' goals change going forward?**

**MEANS:** Even with vaccines and more widespread immunity, it's not likely that everything on Main Street will return to "normal" quickly. But community celebrations that draw people together will once again enliven town centers. And the Main Street approach, tested in thousands of towns over the last 40 years, will continue to frame the work of bringing life back to downtowns.

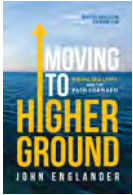
**PLANNING: How do today's COVID-19 challenges compare to the ones communities faced when the Main Street program first started?**

**MEANS:** Main Streets have come through other existential challenges that were expected to kill them off. When the Main Street program began 40-plus years ago, towns had to figure it out by themselves. There was no internet. There were few downtown organizations. In March 2020 as everything shut down, Main Street organizations sprang into action—helping retailers and restaurants navigate PPP loan applications, working to create safe outdoor eating and shopping spaces, coaching novices to online selling, and sharing experiences.

**PLANNING: What's the first step toward recovery?**

**MEANS:** Whether or not they know it, most communities—certainly those with downtown organizations—have already begun to ready themselves for "after COVID." They are changing policies and regulations

*Julie Von Bergen is APA's senior editor.*



**Moving to Higher Ground: Rising Sea Level and the Path Forward**

John Englander (University of California, Santa Cruz), 2021, Science Bookshelf, 222 pp.; \$27.95 cloth \$19.95 paper

“The dumbest thing we can do is wait for the water to reach us,” writes John Englander in his new book, following up on his 2012 title *High Tide on Main Street*. He makes a convincing case that sea levels are rising due to global warming and the resulting glacial meltdowns. The speed of rise is likely to surprise residents of offshore islands (Holland Island in Chesapeake Bay is already gone) and inland places like Sacramento, California.

“Even if we could immediately stop all carbon dioxide emissions and the warming, the excess heat already stored in the sea will continue to melt the ice sheets for centuries.” This is a challenge for which few jurisdictions are ready.

The author makes clear that U.S. federal flood insurance is a disaster in itself—in fact, it’s not even insurance, it’s a government-promoted incentive for people to build close to the water rather than move inland. Attempts to put the program on a realistic basis have so far failed.

How to get people and politicians to pay attention? Englander defers to the late French explorer Jacques Cousteau, who hoped to see citizens and organizations take the lead, presenting complex issues in simple, visual, and emotionally compelling terms.

*Harold Henderson is Planning’s book reviewer. Send new books and news of forthcoming publications to him at 1355 W. Springville Road, LaPorte, IN 46350; email librarytraveler@gmail.com.*

**‘Even if we could immediately stop all carbon dioxide emissions and the warming, the excess heat already stored in the sea will continue to melt the ice sheets for centuries.’**

—MOVING TO HIGHER GROUND: RISING SEA LEVEL AND THE PATH FORWARD



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Adaptive reuse can help solve the housing crisis—  
with a little help from planners and policy makers.

By TATIANA WALK-MORRIS

# NEW LIVES FO

## SANTA ANA ARTS COLLECTIVE

Santa Ana, California

**PROJECT:** Offices originally built in 1965 converted into 100 percent affordable artist housing and public and private amenities.

**HOUSING:** 58 studios and one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments in the existing building, plus 10 new affordable townhomes; 10 units are specifically dedicated to extremely low-income residents.

**OF NOTE:** Constructed under Santa Ana's adaptive reuse ordinance, this Studio One Eleven project helps advance two city missions: provide much-needed affordable housing, and promote and program the area as an arts and culture district. Units are designed as live-work lofts, and the building offers cultural amenities for residents and the public, including art, dance, and music studios and an art gallery.



# R OLD SPACES



Originally built in 1965, this building in Santa Ana, California, (below) was transformed from offices into 58 affordable apartments for artists. STUDIO ONE ELEVEN; RENDERING BY LANGDON WILSON ARCHITECTS





LONG BEFORE THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, U.S. cities were already plagued with a housing crisis. In many markets, rents were rising, housing production wasn't keeping up, and affordable housing was short nationally by more than seven million rental units, the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated in 2018.

Overall, construction was failing to resolve the shortage of rental units at diverse prices, says the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, leaving renters cash strapped. In 2000, 14 million people dedicated more than 30 percent of their income to rent; in 2019, that number surpassed 20 million, says *The State of the Nation's Housing 2020*, the most recent annual report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies.

And then came the pandemic. Despite its layoffs and eviction moratoriums, rents have continued to climb. According to the report, the 12-month period ending in September 2020 saw an average price increase of 8.8 percent, down only one percentage point from 2019.

One thing is clear: The country needs more housing at affordable rates—and now might be the time to produce them. While shelter-in-place orders temporarily halted construction last year, work has largely been rebounding, experts say.

"With its current momentum, the housing sector could lead to a broader recovery," *The State of the Nation's Housing 2020* says. And according to some experts, those efforts could help address another existing issue exacerbated by the pandemic.



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Much attention has been paid to a portion of the workforce going unexpectedly remote last year, leaving office buildings empty. As *Planning* reported in January ("Ghosts in the Office"), empty office space available for sublease in New York City increased by 50 percent between the start of the pandemic and October, potentially putting the municipal budget at risk—Manhattan's 400 million square feet of office space provides 10 percent of the city's tax revenue.

But it's not just office buildings. Across the U.S., countless other structures were already underused, abandoned, or functionally obsolete before the pandemic. The U.S. government alone owned about 45,000 of them in 2014, according to *The Economist*.

Could adaptive reuse resolve our lack of housing and excess of empty, unproductive buildings? Some experts say yes, but to help make it happen, planners and other policy makers will need to remove regulatory obstacles that stand in the way.

#### Opportunities abound

Transforming old buildings into housing is nothing new, but in the last few decades, we've seen an uptick in residential adaptive reuse. According to data from Yardi Matrix, 14 buildings were converted into apartments in the 1950s; in the 2010s, 778. The trend is steadily building, with factories, hotels, schools, and warehouses the most popular to repurpose into affordable housing, research from Yardi Matrix and RENTCafé suggests.

Scott Maenpaa, project manager at The Architectural Team, has firsthand experience. For 15 years, he's worked on adaptive reuse projects like The Central Building in Worcester, Massachusetts, an eight-story, 105,000-square-foot structure originally built in 1925. Now a residential building, it was once offices, with a coffee shop and newspaper and sandwich stands on the second floor. Those areas now support small group gatherings, Maenpaa says, with a 300-square-foot quiet room, a 400-square-foot game room, and a 300-square-foot media room. New pods also give residents a place to work without disturbances.

Adding more empty office buildings to the list of potential adaptive reuse projects will likely strengthen the force of this trend. Maenpaa expects many companies will normalize a remote

## 8 ADVANTAGES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

*Finding new uses for old buildings offers a variety of benefits, from cost savings to sustainability.*

**B**uildings have long been reused and reconfigured, particularly in the 17 and 18th centuries, when scarce materials and limited transportation made it difficult and expensive to construct new buildings. But as the country became industrialized and a national transportation network was developed, low-priced materials were more accessible, and it was easier to demolish older buildings and replace them with new structures.

Today, that situation is changing. Materials and labor have become more expensive, and the disposal of demolition debris in landfills is less convenient. At the same time, the unique qualities of older buildings are being recognized, and many communities value their contributions to neighborhood character.

Be they empty offices or strip malls, many of our underused, abandoned, or otherwise obsolete buildings can find a second life through new uses. Here are eight ways adaptive reuse can benefit developers, residents, and the community at large:

**1. PRESERVE THE PAST.** Extending the life of old buildings can provide a link between your community's past and future, all while accommodating its present needs.



Built in 1875 as the Boston Young Men's Christian Union, The Union at 48 Boylston was rehabbed in 2019 to provide 46 units of affordable housing, including 25 for those who have experienced homelessness.

**2. GROW SMARTER AND MORE SUSTAINABLY.** Many properties ripe for reuse are in established growth areas with significant population densities. Giving them new life supports growth where there's infrastructure to support it.

**3. ENCOURAGE INVESTMENT.** Adaptive reuse can yield potential tax generation, employment opportunities, and housing. One project might even inspire more investment, development, and revitalization in the surrounding areas, including through other adaptive reuse projects.

**4. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INCENTIVES.** Building owners may be eligible for federal tax credits for rehabilitation investments in older or historic buildings and other incentives.

**5. SAVE TIME.** When the building and infrastructure is already in place, municipal approval and permitting can often occur more quickly and less expensively than new construction.

**6. AND MONEY, TOO.** Reuse saves on demolition costs, promotes recycling, and preserves unique architectural details and features that would otherwise be costly to recreate. The materials and quality of construction of existing buildings are often not economically possible to reproduce today.

**7. BOOST MARKET VALUES.** Preserving the integrity of the materials and design characteristic of older buildings can increase the new project's property value.

**8. IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH.** Remediation of contaminants associated with some older building materials and uses can provide both environmental and health benefits.

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*Adapted from Chester County (Pennsylvania) Planning Commission's Planning Toolbox: [bit.ly/3rxftt8](https://bit.ly/3rxftt8).*



## RICHARDSON HALL

San Francisco

**PROJECT:** A teacher training school originally built in 1924 converted into LGBTQ-friendly affordable senior housing with amenities, office space, and retail.

**HOUSING:** 40 units.

**OF NOTE:** The building was designated a landmark by the city, so maintaining its historic fabric was a priority for the design teams from Van Meter Williams Pollack and Page & Turnbull. The original windows were kept, the exterior stucco was restored, and when historic murals were found on the premises, work was halted until they could be preserved by an art conservator. They are now on display for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style in 1924 (right), this former school is now senior housing.  
VAN METER WILLIAMS POLLACK/  
PAGE & TURNBULL



or hybrid work model post-pandemic—and repurposing unused offices into housing just makes sense, he says.

### Zoning reform

But on Main Streets and in central business areas, restrictive zoning is a massive hurdle, says Sara Bronin, lawyer and professor at the University of Connecticut School of Law.

Industrial areas often aren't zoned for residential use, Maenpaa says, so repurposing those structures for housing requires special permits, or for zoning ordinances to be waived altogether. And while property owners can seek a variance, it generally requires proof of hardship so severe that they must permanently deviate from the terms of the zoning ordinance, Bronin says.

"Zoning is one of those things that I think will be reexamined in the post-COVID era to see whether it has unintentional consequences in terms of making it very difficult for us to adapt flexibly as society changes, as demographics change, and as things like pandemics come our way," Bronin says. Rather than relying on one property owner to go to court for a variance, she suggests that municipalities create more flexible zoning in the first place.

Over the past few decades, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and a growing number of cities have been developing ordinances, programs, and overlays to help clear the way for adaptive reuse projects. LA's ordinance (ARO) was the first of its kind when it was adopted in the downtown area in 1999, and after expansions into other neighborhoods, it's helped create over 46,000 new residential units.

But it has also received criticism for not doing enough to protect and promote affordable housing. During the pandemic, city leaders have called for ARO updates that would prioritize below-market-rate housing.

The motion, introduced by LA council member Paul Koretz in December, was under review by the council's planning committee as of this writing. If approved, it would expand and update the ARO in a variety of ways, including increasing the types of existing buildings that are eligible, mandating ground-floor retail space in new projects, and limiting housing developments in some instances to only those affordable to

moderate-income earners, defined as households of four earning no more than \$92,750 a year. Currently, the median price of rent for a one-bedroom apartment in LA hovers around \$2,400, well out of reach for many.

"Adaptive reuse has been a success story in the city since 1999, when the city enacted the ordinance, thereby allowing much needed housing," Koretz writes in the motion. "Now, with more Angelinos working from home, the city has the opportunity to adaptively reuse more types of buildings for affordable housing."

### ADAPTIVE REUSE

This edition of *PAS Quicknotes* highlights the benefits of adaptive reuse and discusses how to implement a strategy to promote it.

### READ

[bit.ly/3dVrEMl](http://bit.ly/3dVrEMl)

### Rethinking building codes

Zoning isn't the only barrier, particularly when it comes to preservation guidelines. Strict applications of building codes, which often require compliance with modern rules that don't fit such structures, could dissuade property owners from pursuing historic adaptive reuse projects, Bronin says. She gives the example of stair width requirements, which many historical buildings don't meet. Updating them to today's standards could be cost prohibitive for developers.

Planners should reexamine local codes to encourage these projects, she says. For example, Santa Ana, California's adaptive reuse ordinance, which is similar to LA's and was adopted in 2014 with the partial goal of preservation, offers alternative building regulations and fire standards.

Repurposing historic properties also comes with the added requirement of adhering to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation guidelines. These standards outline rules for tasks like installing energy-efficient windows and raising or relocating structures, the latter of which is frowned upon but may be necessary for today's climate change needs, Bronin says.

"Oftentimes, we see overly restrictive interpretations of historic adaptive reuse guidance, which means that something that we might think from a climate perspective is smart to put in a building is something that is discouraged by some historic preservation guidance," Bronin says. "My suggestion to planners and policy makers is really to try to be flexible enough to meet the many different demands that we have on our buildings. Not just in terms of the use of the buildings, but also in terms of the way that they're actually built."

Repurposing historic buildings should begin with understanding what gives them their cultural value in the first place, Bronin adds. The Architectural Team's Maenpaa recommends working with historic consultants who can give direction there, as well as provide feedback on what federal historic agencies require.

When the firm of Page & Turnbull adapted Richardson Hall from a San Francisco State Teacher's College building into affordable housing for LGBTQ seniors, Elisa Skaggs, architect and associate principal there, says the firm had to work closely with city and historic preservation planners to solve problems that arose. Among the surprises the firm found were multiple murals that had been painted over. The team consulted with an art conservator to assist in their restoration and preservation, Skaggs says, and the project was halted so the city could make sure the artwork wasn't mistakenly demolished.

### Adaptive in all senses

The pandemic is influencing design in real time, Maenpaa says. In ongoing projects over the past year, his firm has been adding new amenities that respond to current needs, like work pods. And in a forthcoming assisted living development, the firm has added a visitation room with a glass wall separating visitors from elderly residents.

Repurposing office buildings into housing just makes sense from a public health perspective, he says. While an industrial mill could be converted into a housing development with 30 units per floor, smaller office buildings may only accommodate eight to 10 units, better allowing for socializing and physical distancing, he explains.

Page & Turnbull's Skaggs is confident historic buildings can be repurposed to meet today's health concerns, too. Her firm is working on a museum project with enhanced ventilation, sanitation stations, and touchless restroom amenities.

"Understanding the building, understanding this history—you work within that context and then you make changes to not just adapt it for this new use, but, in this case, adapt it to better function in the COVID-19 environment," Skaggs says.

*Tatiana Walk-Morris is a Detroit-native, Chicago-based independent journalist.*



### COURTHOUSE LOFTS

Worcester, Massachusetts

**PROJECT:** A county courthouse built in 1845 and its later addition being converted into mixed-income housing and indoor and outdoor amenities. Phased opening starts this spring.

**HOUSING:** Nearly 95 percent of the 118 units are affordable: 13 for extremely low-income households; 38 for households at or below 60 percent of the area median income (AMI); 16 for households at or below 80 percent of the AMI; and 45 workforce housing units for households at or below 110 percent of the AMI.

**OF NOTE:** Transforming a 19th century courthouse and its subsequent additions into housing that meets today's needs is no easy feat. For example, many internal spaces lacked windows, so designers The Architectural Team created two interior courtyards to flood the core of the building with natural light.

This former courthouse (right, circa 1908) now offers mixed-income housing. Here, part of a former courtroom was transformed into an affordable unit.

RENDERING BY THE ARCHITECTURAL TEAM, DETROIT PUBLISHING COMPANY/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS





# GREENLIGHTING CANNABIS

By studying what has worked—and what hasn't—in other communities, planners can learn to spot pitfalls and solutions when legalization comes to their state.

By DANIEL C. VOCK





Workers inspect cannabis plants in a Denver warehouse. Recreational cannabis regulations limit cultivation facilities there to areas that are already zoned for industrial use, leading to equity issues. DAVID KIDD/GOVERNING

## **THE HEART OF DENVER'S LEGAL CANNABIS PRODUCTION IS IN DOZENS OF UNMARKED WAREHOUSES, RINGED WITH BARBED WIRE AND SECURITY CAMERAS, AND LOCATED AMID FACTORIES, RAILYARDS, CONSTRUCTION RENTAL LOTS, AND OTHER INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS. SOMETIMES THESE POT-PRODUCING FACILITIES SIT QUITE NEAR, AND IN SOME CASES ACROSS THE STREET FROM, ROWS OF MODEST SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES IN PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND HISPANIC NEIGHBORHOODS.**

The reason? Denver recreational cannabis regulations limit cultivation facilities to areas that are already zoned for industrial use. That essentially pushes all the growing activity into a few areas of town—and neighborhoods. One of the highest concentrations of cannabis growing locations in Denver, for example, is in the predominantly Hispanic neighborhood of Elyria-Swansea on the north side of the city. Its streets are choked with semi-trucks making their way to and from a hulking viaduct carrying Interstate 70, a highway the state is now expanding.

“We basically let marijuana come into Denver without really having a good plan of how to regulate it,” said Candi CdeBaca, a city council member from Elyria-Swansea who can see four cannabis growing facilities from her house. There are 31 cultivation facilities in that neighborhood; 32 in neighboring Northeast Park Hill, a majority Black neighborhood; and 33 in nearby Montbello, a primarily Hispanic neighborhood.

The city’s approach to regulating land use for cannabis operations has led to many hard-to-solve problems for neighborhoods like Elyria-Swansea—and could serve as a cautionary tale for planners in other states that could soon legalize the recreational use of cannabis.

Nationwide, momentum for legalization is growing. In 2014, Colorado was one of the first two states to start allowing pot sales, but just last November, five states passed ballot measures to legalize recreational cannabis, including Montana and South Dakota—two largely rural states on a list otherwise dominated by states with large urban centers. In early 2021, New Jersey and

Virginia joined the list when their respective state legislative bodies voted to approve bills legalizing adult recreational cannabis use.

All told, as of this writing, 16 states and the District of Columbia have now approved legalizing recreational cannabis, while many others have decriminalized the drug or authorized its use for medical purposes. Democratic governors in places like Connecticut, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are pushing for legalization in their states, too.

Meanwhile, in December—for the first time—the U.S. House of Representatives passed a cannabis legalization bill. Now that Democrats control both chambers of Congress and the White House, the prospects of similar proposals becoming law has increased, but is by no means certain.

With that kind of trajectory, policy experts say communities everywhere should be thinking about and planning for legalized recreational cannabis. Fortunately, they can look to local jurisdictions in states that have gone before them for lessons on what works—and what doesn’t.

### **Regulatory roulette**

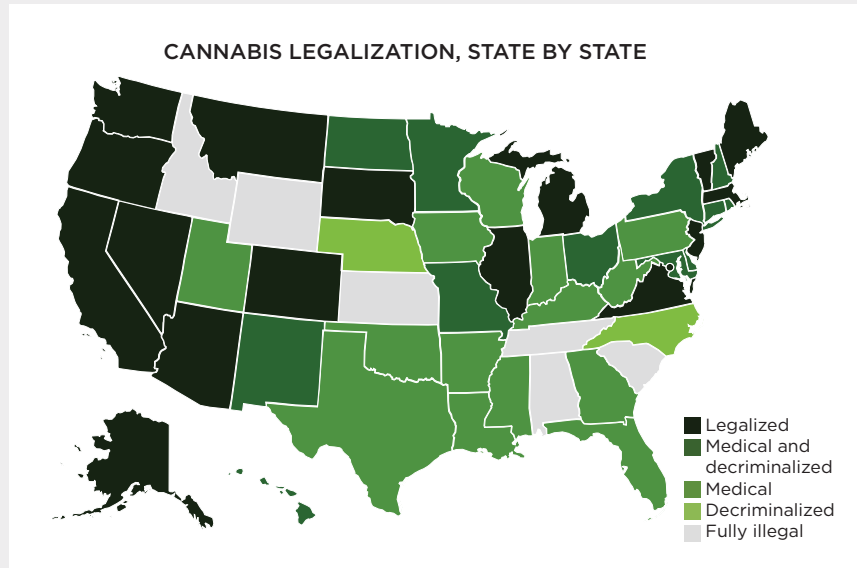
From the land-use side, each state has handled the transition differently, giving municipalities different powers to control the placement of the new facilities. Some, like California, allow cities to ban the facilities outright. Others have curbed the powers of local governments to make sure the new industry is allowed to thrive.

Alan Weinstein, a law professor at Cleveland State University who specializes in land use, says

## COAST TO COAST, CANNABIS LEGISLATION GAINS TRACTION

As of March 2021, cannabis is fully illegal in only a handful of states. Policy experts say that states that have already legalized medical uses should be thinking about and planning for legalized recreational cannabis as well. In early 2021, New Jersey and Virginia became the 15th and 16th states to legalize cannabis. Democratic governors in places like Connecticut, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are pushing for legislation in their states, too.

SOURCE: DISA.COM;  
DATA: AS OF MARCH 2021



cannabis facilities raise some of the same land-use questions as drug stores or liquor stores.

But there are unique aspects to the cannabis industry as well. One of the biggest is that nobody worries about the crops—like grains or potatoes—that produce alcoholic beverages, but people do have concerns about how and where cannabis plants are cultivated. The fact that cannabis is still illegal at the federal level also means that retail facilities that sell cannabis products by and large cannot use credit cards or anything tied with traditional banks, so they operate almost entirely in cash. While there is little evidence that pot dispensaries have higher crime rates than other types of retail establishments, many localities have required them to install more security features, such as fences and cameras, to prevent crime in the area.

Overall, though, Weinstein says the owners of cannabis businesses are willing to agree to many conditions about where they can locate and what features their facilities must have. That's because many are trying to get a toehold in places where the industry is not already established. They will

### **FROM SEED TO SALE**

More from *Planning*: As more states legalize marijuana, local planners tackle land-use and zoning challenges to make the new industry work for their community.

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compete for the ability to set up a medical dispensary knowing that companies that have licenses for medical cannabis are often first in line when a state expands to allow recreational use.

“They’re willing to go along with pretty much anything, as long as it isn’t going to sort of drive them totally out of business or make it unreasonably impractical to operate,” Weinstein says.

### **At the ready**

On the other hand, local planners in places where recreational cannabis is coming need to prepare for a big surge in applications. Planning departments need to be ready to accept, review, and process applications. They need to develop a way to renew and transfer licenses. They need to write requirements for the buildings, set up inspection teams, prepare for hearings, and consider what local fees and taxes they can implement.

“The local government has to be prepared to take on a whole new regulatory regime,” Weinstein warns. “And yes, you can use the new [tax and fee] dollars to help offset the costs of the administration, but the costs are going to lead the revenue.”



Corinne Celko, a land-use attorney for Emerge Law Group in Portland, Oregon, says the spread of the cannabis industry presents a unique challenge for planners and localities.

“If I went on *Shark Tank* today because I had invented a gadget and it was successful, and I wanted to go ahead and sell the gadget and make more of the gadget, it would just fit within local jurisdictions’ existing development codes and their use categories,” she says. “This is the first time in my career where many local jurisdictions treated cannabis as a completely, totally new use.”

Not every jurisdiction has taken that approach, but those that do want to create whole new use categories need to understand how the cannabis industry actually works.

For example, if a local government wanted to zone an area for agricultural use to grow cannabis, officials and planners should anticipate warehouses and greenhouses, not fields of row crops.

Evanston, Illinois, city council member Robin Rue Simmons successfully pushed for a measure to divert all city tax revenue from adult-use cannabis to a reparation fund for Black residents who had been disproportionately harmed by the war on drugs.

That might make it a good fit for industrial zones in addition to farming areas. One locality where Celko was working wanted to allow the manufacture of cannabis edibles and topicals, but it wanted to prohibit extract processing. Celko had to explain to the planning director that banning extract processing would effectively ban companies from making edibles. “Nobody wants to pick out pieces of grass from their teeth,” she says.

But—apart from use designation—planners do have plenty of tools to ensure a smooth rollout, Celko notes. For example, they can work on restrictions on how and when properties are used, such as “dark sky” rules to reduce light pollution in rural areas or odor control regulations that require filtering systems.

Local officials should also be willing to revise policies that aren’t working how they intended. One Oregon county, for example, wanted to block cannabis farms from being located near “youth

# OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, HELPS CANNABIS BUSINESSES GET LICENSED QUICKLY, EVEN AS IT DEDICATES HALF OF ITS LICENSES FOR EQUITY APPLICANTS WHO HAD BEEN CONVICTED OF A CANNABIS-RELATED CRIME.

activity centers.” But the county did not define what that meant and did not amend the code to provide more clarity. Instead, the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners fought the applicant—one of Celko’s clients, a grower—and lost at the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals and at the Oregon Court of Appeals.

In California, attorney Joanna Hossack says, the rollout of recreational cannabis has been slowed by municipalities that chose not to allow cannabis businesses within their borders. Meanwhile, many business licenses have stalled in cities with long approval processes, especially ones that involve public hearings rather than just administrative decisions, she says. And state environmental reviews have taken longer than expected.

There have been bright spots in the rollout, Hossack notes. San Francisco has done a good job helping stores open quickly, and, across the bay, Oakland has helped businesses get licensed quickly, even as it dedicates half of its licenses for equity applicants who have either lived in certain parts of the city or been convicted of a cannabis-related crime in Oakland.

But across the state, 70 percent of municipalities have opted not to license cannabis businesses, creating large “dry pockets” outside of urban areas like Los Angeles County and the Bay Area, she says. That means even patients who use medical cannabis in those areas now have to drive long stretches to find cannabis products. “That is a shame,” Hossack says. “Given that California is a leader, you would think we would have more cities that are online.... Prohibiting it isn’t reaching the goals people want, and prohibition doesn’t work.”

One key for successfully introducing a recreational cannabis facility in Evanston, Illinois, was educating the general public about the changes that were afoot, says Johanna Nyden, AICP, the city’s community development director. Residents had many worries about the implications of legalizing



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recreational cannabis, such as whether it would lead to an increase in crime or long lines outside the downtown dispensary that would go from selling medical cannabis to selling recreational cannabis. (Neither of those things happened.) City officials tried to share information before rumors could take hold, Nyden says, and many of the state lawmakers from the area who authored Illinois’s recreational cannabis law appeared at community events to answer questions.

“As planners, we are often focused on the zoning and entitlement process, but we often miss the parts that result in the knee-jerk reactions,” Nyden says.

Evanston, a Chicago suburb that is home to the main campus of Northwestern University, has only one dispensary, and it’s on city property. The store sits across from an art supply store and a movie theater, and is so “innocuous” that you might not even notice it, she says.

But Evanston did attract national attention for how it plans to use its tax revenues on cannabis sales: by using up to \$10 million as reparations for the Black community that had been disproportionately harmed by the war on drugs. City officials have not yet decided how to use the money, but possibilities include grants to help Black residents who lived in Evanston between 1919 and 1969 (or descendants of those residents) buy homes, or building a new school in the historically Black area of town.

While the reparations proposal came after the land-use changes, Nyden says it has been a good way to acknowledge some of the “inherent hypocrisy” in allowing cannabis use now after decades of punishing people, especially Black residents, for possessing small amounts of the drug.

## Unintended consequences

Back in Denver, city council member CdeBaca says many of the current problems with industrial

# THE PROBLEMS WITH THE SATURATION OF CANNABIS FACILITIES IN DENVER ARE JUST PART OF A BIGGER PROBLEM OF HOW INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES AFFECT SOME RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS MORE THAN OTHERS.

cannabis sites were the result of poor planning early on. The city has put restrictions on where facilities can be located, but many of the sites in Elyria-Swansea don't conform to those rules because the structures predate them. What's more, the licenses of nonconforming sites can be transferred to new owners and continue to operate, so there's no easy way to reduce the number of facilities in the area.

The saturation of sites did eventually lead the city to stop issuing new licenses in 2016. Before it starts giving out new ones, CdeBaca hopes to pass legislation that will encourage more Black and Hispanic people to get those licenses, because the current owners are overwhelmingly white.

In fact, Denver's excise and license department is preparing the biggest update to its cannabis licensing regulation since Colorado's first cannabis retailers opened in 2014.

The "Marijuana 2.0" revisions were expected to come before the council in March. They include new regulations to allow delivery services and hospitality sales (where customers can use cannabis on their premises), says department spokesperson Eric Escudero. Those regulations will also try to address equity concerns, he says. "People who were most disproportionately negatively impacted by marijuana prohibition should benefit from legalization," he says. "That means creating a market where more people get benefit, whether through ownership or management or employment opportunities."

The rules would also try to prevent further saturation of neighborhoods with cannabis businesses by not allowing any more licenses in the five most saturated areas of the city.

But the issue of concentration of existing facilities is complicated by Denver's approach to treat cannabis as just another industry in terms of zoning. From a land-use perspective, you can currently grow cannabis plants at an industrial scale anywhere in the city where you can grow

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tomato plants. Any special requirements regarding signage or security are part of the city's cannabis licensing process, not its zoning process.

"In terms of control and management, there's a lot of upside to regulating the business, as opposed to the land use," says Tina Axelrad, the zoning administrator for the City and County of Denver. She called the approach "brilliant" because it helps government agencies keep track of who owns the businesses and whether they are fit for that role. It also easier to make sure that businesses comply with regulations the city wants to impose, because business owners tend to react more quickly when their annual license is at stake than when they have been cited for zoning violations.

"Zoning is just a tool to implement policy," Axelrad says, "and if policy changes regarding where marijuana growers should be located or should not be located in the city, the zoning will be adjusted." But she says that the problems with the cannabis facilities are just part of a bigger problem of how industrial activities affect some residential neighborhoods more than others.

"Industrial zones, just like anywhere else in the U.S., tend to be a dumping ground for a lot of things that we don't want in our commercial corridors," she says.

## Setting an example

Escudero, from the licensing agency, says Denver's regulatory scheme focused primarily on public safety, whether that was ensuring that youth weren't exposed to cannabis or making sure that the possibility of fires from manufacturing cannabis products was limited to industrial areas. "We're proud of our success in doing that," he says, "because if Denver would have screwed this up, you would not have seen legalization spreading to other communities across the U.S."

In the meantime, CdeBaca says the concentration of industry sites in her neighborhood is causing all sorts of issues. The warehouses themselves



“look like jails.” With all the security features, residents rarely interact with the people who work in the grow houses, and the owners of the facilities are rarely around.

“It’s a little dystopian in some sense, because it’s this neighbor that we never meet,” she said. “It’s like a fortress, but an ugly one.”

As unsightly as the warehouses are, they are also driving up the price of the land that they sit on, because there are limited areas within the city where those types of facilities can be located. The more expensive land makes it harder to attract other kinds of businesses to the area and leads to higher property taxes for nearby residents, which fuels displacement, CdeBaca says.

“Our property values are being driven up very high very fast, without the typical, visible gentrification improvements,” she says. “It looks exactly the same.”

She says it’s unfair to burden Black and Brown

Candi CdeBaca, a Denver city council member from Elyria-Swansea, can see four cannabis growing facilities—like the one in the background here—from her house. “We basically let marijuana come into Denver without really having a good plan of how to regulate it,” she says.

neighborhoods with the costs of hosting the industry for the whole city or region. “Whiter, wealthier people want to buy their edibles, but they just don’t want the grows in their neighborhood,” CdeBaca says.

She believes Denver should assess impact fees on the industry to improve the neighborhoods its facilities are located in. “We’re carrying this industry on our back, and it’s creating such a revenue stream, but we don’t [get funds for the neighborhood]. It goes to the whole city to use how they want, when only a small slice of the city is carrying the burden,” she says.

That, she stresses, is an important factor for planners to keep in mind as they decide where facilities are sited as the industry expands. “Don’t layer on to the legacies of redlining,” she says.

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*Daniel C. Vock is a public policy reporter based in Washington, D.C.*

# A Room of One's Own

A well-designed public space is an inclusive one, where everyone feels like they belong. *By ELISE OBERLIESEN*

**W**E'VE ALL ENCOUNTERED places that make us feel or behave a certain way. The oft-cited example of Danish urbanist Jan Gehl's findings, that people walk more quickly on sidewalks lined with blank building facades than they do those with first-floor windows, demonstrates that fact well.

Public spaces like parks, plazas, and trails are no different. Beyond safety and basic usability, the look, feel, and function of these spaces can significantly affect whether a person wants—or is even able—to spend time and engage there.

Planners and urban design professionals understand the inherent challenges of creating these kinds of spaces that win the hearts of their communities. And over the past year in particular, COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing requirements have both increased the need for public spaces and reemphasized the importance of inclusive, multigenerational design.

As urban designers continue to assess how public spaces serve communities and how to make them inclusive for everyone, it's important to understand how designs can influence who feels supported and welcome—and who doesn't.

## One size does not fit all

Designing inclusive public spaces is far from cut and dried. There's no universal design checklist to follow because each community is vastly different, says Grace Kim, founding principal of Schemata Workshop, an architecture and planning firm in Seattle.

It's best to avoid a "prescriptive" approach and instead take time to understand the needs and desires of each community and each project, says Kim. "Planners can fall into the trap of thinking: This is how I did it last time...this project was successful, and since both projects are alike, we're going to repeat," she says. This



## FURTHER IMPACTS: PUBLIC REALM

Social media organizing is influencing popular awareness and eliciting responses from governments and organizations. Public dialogues are often simultaneously manifested in public spaces.

approach can easily backfire, she adds.

Inclusiveness is a foundational value for the Underline, a 10-mile multimodal urban trail, park, and art destination in Miami-Dade, Florida. "We believe the Underline and our team must represent the people and neighborhoods we serve," says Meg Daly, founder of the project, created through a public-private partnership.

The Underline sits three to six stories below the behemoth Miami Metrorail train tracks, runs through more than a dozen neighborhoods, and connects communities all along the 26-mile metrorail system. Those transit connections help locals and travelers alike enjoy the space, regardless of car ownership or ability to drive.

To help understand all of their needs, the project team created extensive and intentional public engagement opportunities, Daly says. They collected information at supermarkets and held dozens of public meetings and input sessions, all scheduled at different times of the week and weekend. This kind of intention is particularly critical for gathering and incorporating the feedback of traditionally underserved populations—and not just the loudest or easiest to reach voices.

While the Underline officially opened on February 26, collecting public input is an ongoing process, says Daly. "We have quarterly community connections sessions and continue [to gather] public input on what residents, businesses, and visitors want for future park amenities in phases two and three," she says.

This work has been helped by the diversity of the team members from the design and planning firm hired for the first phase, James Corner Field Operations, which also designed the High Line in New York City. Their bilingual team was a great fit for the Miami-Dade community, where about 66 percent of residents are Spanish speakers, according to Miami Matters.

According to Tina Kempin Reuter, PHD, an





associate professor with the University of Alabama at Birmingham and director with the Institute for Human Rights, intentional team diversity is critical. “If you look at successful teams, they include diversity in the design team and in their policy-making process.”

And yet, despite their many advantages, diverse teams are rare, Reuter says. Of the many reasons for that, “probably the most important” is that “diversity is not seen as a priority,” she says. But in addition to our professional skills, our race, age, gender, disability status, and other factors of identity contribute different perspectives to a project.

**Welcoming, flexible spaces**

Successful, inclusive spaces begin with creating a “welcome feeling” for all users, says Daly. There’s more to it than investing in lighting, security, and

In Miami, The Underline’s Brickell Backyard has a series of “rooms” for activities ranging from fitness classes to dominoes to gardens and park-like settings for relaxation.

**PREPARING TO THRIVE**

The long-term trends and emerging issues facing the profession are many and changeable, but can be grouped into critical topic areas. *Planning* will cover them throughout the year, in print and at [planning.org/planning](http://planning.org/planning).

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# STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING (AND REDESIGNING) SPACES FOR ALL

*Actively inclusive design in public space lays a foundation for the kind of civic life that builds a sense of attachment and belonging for everyone.* BY KATHERINE PEINHARDT AND NATE STORRING

A key purpose of a public space is to create room for people to take part in civic, physical, and social activity. Designs should include as many members of the community as possible. Here are a few strategies to start:

**1. DESIGN FOR DIFFERING ABILITIES.** Great places are designed for the enjoyment of everyone, including those with differing cognitive, sensory, physical, or developmental abilities. Nearly every feature of a public space can be optimized for maximum accessibility—tactile strips at crosswalks; accessible restrooms and parking spaces; color contrast applications to poles, bollards, and steps—and can go beyond simply meeting requirements set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**2. CONSIDER GENDER DYNAMICS.** Public space professionals must tune into how people of different genders, and gender identities and expressions navigate and use a public space. While features like clear entrance and exit paths, visible wayfinding, and unobstructed lines of sight can make everyone feel more at ease, safety is not the whole picture. To make a place for people of all gender expressions and sexual identities, the key is making a space feel not only open, but also exciting. To this end, Burnside Park in Providence, Rhode Island, implemented new design elements like a stage, a storage shed, and an outdoor



The water play area in Leitchcroft Park in Markham, Ontario, has universal appeal.

reading room, which facilitated a greater variety of programming and in turn attracted a higher proportion of women and children.

**3. PROVIDE AMENITIES FOR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.** It is all too common for public space professionals to aim either to replicate other “iconic” parks or to create low-maintenance, low-imagination facilities that result in “aggressive blandness.” To avoid these copy-paste design choices, we have to put in the legwork to continue the outreach process, tapping into the values and uses of different groups over time. For example, Toronto noticed that South Asian community members were dissatisfied with Leitchcroft Park, so the city listened to their needs, which included replacing benches with “social,” movable seating and more shaded areas and water features.

**4. RECOGNIZE PUBLIC SPACES AS STORYTELLERS.** Use branding, wayfinding, memorials, and signage—and be thoughtful about their content—to tell the community’s stories. Find ways to be proactively inclusive, not merely inoffensive. For example, progressive public history organization Paper Monuments specializes in participatory, temporary public space displays that detail the (often difficult) histories of a city or a park—a powerful but “lighter, quicker, cheaper” effort to dive deeper into the story of a community through the lens of public space.

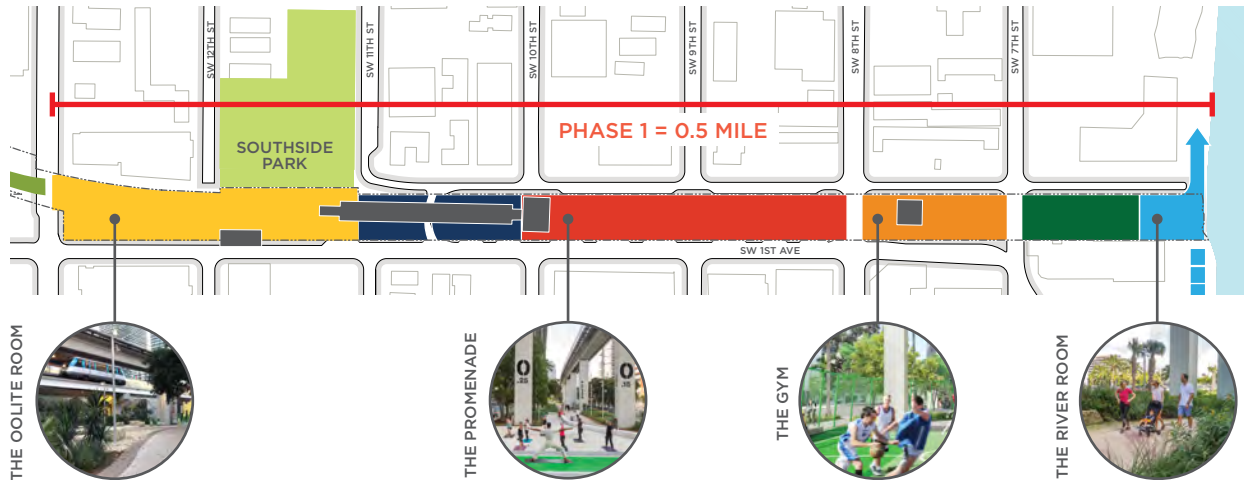
**5. MAKE A LITTLE ROOM FOR RETAIL.** Public spaces that provide opportunities for underrepresented vendors can attract a broader audience and play a part in redistributing economic opportunities to people who may not otherwise have access to a physical location to sell their products or services. Places like Union Market in Mankato, Minnesota, provide small-scale spaces (some as small as 100 square feet), that give owners of small or fledgling businesses a chance to build up their customer base with less risk and financial burden than opening a full storefront elsewhere.

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*Nate Storing is co-executive director of communications for Project for Public Spaces. Katherine Peinhardt is a former project reporter and communications associate at PPS. This article was adapted from “Inclusive by Design: Laying a Foundation for Diversity in Public Space,” originally published by PPS as part of a series called A Playbook for Inclusive Placemaking.*

## MIAMI'S INCLUSIVE UNDERLINE PROJECT, PHASE 1

The Underline's northernmost portion, the Brickell Backyard, is a procession of unique rooms around the park's dedicated bike and pedestrian paths. Each room is designed to respond to specific needs of local community members.



### THE OOLITE ROOM

Naturalized garden spaces with ample seating line the bicycle and pedestrian paths. Gardens feature pollinator species and butterfly attractors.

### THE PROMENADE

Wide sidewalks lined with seating accommodate foot traffic from nearby bus, trolley, and metrorail stops, while a series of flexible social spaces include movable tables and chairs, bike parking, tables for chess and dominoes, a 50-foot-long communal dining table, and a plaza and stage.

### THE GYM

A regulation-sized basketball court is surrounded by spaces for exercising, including built-in strength training equipment, stretch and balance areas, and spaces for outdoor fitness classes—all surrounded by a running track.

### THE RIVER ROOM

Various seating areas and native plant gardens offer views of the Miami River and respond to residents' request for a parklike, nature-based setting in an otherwise highly urban area of Miami.

SOURCE: JAMES CORNER FIELD OPERATIONS

Americans with Disabilities Act requirements—though those are all vital.

Creating a welcoming feeling is about giving people a space where they feel comfortable and their needs for engagement and expression are met. Here, good design and programming can really shine. The Underline's community priorities, for example, include nature elements, like a pollinator park; gathering places, including a 50-foot dining table and smaller tables with dominoes; and playground and recreational areas. It also offers free amenities for entertainment and a variety of venues for artistic and cultural expressions. Free, intentional programming, such as Miami Ballet performances and yoga classes, offer options regardless of income or ability, says Daly. A gym, track, and flex sports court serve those needs too.

And because visitors can get to the park without driving, accounting for and actively engaging with the community's youth and senior populations have been a priority. The Underline has taken this into account in various ways, including plans for a mix of affordable housing for seniors directly across from tall condos. "We had to make sure we were taking care of the octogenarians, not just the babies," says Daly.

For youth programming, Daly says high school students will soon test their tour guide skills and plant knowledge as part of a youth

engagement program funded by a grant from the Nahmad Family Foundation. "It's an experiment to train juniors and seniors to be ambassadors," while also teaching them about "the power of smart plants that help with drainage," Daly says.

Another key part of the Underline—flexibility—is a valuable tactic for creating a welcoming atmosphere. Flexibility can also help "future proof" design, and one of the things planners and urban designers have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that things can shift dramatically, and often, quickly. Designing inclusivity from the start can help public spaces—and communities—adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

*Elise Oberliesen is a Denver-based U.S. journalist, blogger, and digital marketing professional.*

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE





# MIRROR

## MIRROR

Smart city digital twins help planners be agile and experiment with solutions.

By PETRA HURTADO, PHD, and ALEXSANDRA GOMEZ

Illustration by JASON SCHNEIDER

**W**HETHER IT IS a new vaccine, the next must-have smartphone app, or even a plant-based burger, scientists and developers take advantage of the ability to refine a product in the lab before testing it in the real world and, ultimately, selling it to the customer. In IT, developers work in virtual testing environments called sandboxes to experiment and evaluate software programs and identify potential issues, like threats to cybersecurity, before they arise.

In fact, when most industries set out to develop a new product or solve a problem, they rely on using laboratories, testbeds, or other workspaces to refine and optimize their ideas. But that kind of experimentation and testing is simply not a part of standard planning processes. Could planners use a sandbox in our toolbox? Might smart city digital twins (SCDT) be the answer?

The conversation about experimentation in the planning world can get a little complicated. Sticking to the familiar way of doing things is often the path of least resistance as we balance the needs of residents, stakeholders, and local officials. Yet many plans and policies would benefit from undergoing a test stage before implementation. Up until now the options to do so have been fairly limited.

The concept of using predictive technology in planning is not new. Planners already run traffic simulations to understand transportation

demand or factor in energy use patterns to predict future greenhouse gas emissions. But these are often disjointed attempts that don't account for the fact that cities are complex, meaning policy decisions in one area might end up impacting the built environment of another area. Planners need a more integrated way of simulating the complex potential futures of their cities.

Especially since the dawn of the smart city era, planners have been using our own communities as labs, piloting projects and programs on select city streets or in certain districts. But those urban labs aren't actually laboratories—a controlled space for experimenting—at all. They are often actual neighborhoods where real people live, work, play, and are vulnerable. When planners experiment in these labs, there are real-world consequences.

Prototyping ideas, then learning and adjusting can greatly improve outcomes. A recent edition of *PAS QuickNotes* on design thinking illustrates this idea in the planning field. (Read the article here: [bit.ly/2ZnEASH](https://bit.ly/2ZnEASH).) When done thoughtfully, it can expand public engagement, facilitate community acceptance, and reduce financial risks. Yet as planners, we haven't had a space where we can holistically experiment within the context of an integrated urban system without having to face real-world consequences.

Smart city digital twins promise to change that. SCDT allow planners to explore new solutions to urban problems, improve planning activities such as public engagement and zoning, and address complex issues like climate

resilience—all in a controlled environment that mimics the real city—while also offering a viable tool for telling a city's stories and communicating plans, policies, and outcomes.

### What is a city digital twin?

The term “digital twin” has existed since the early 2000s. Beginning with applications in manufacturing and construction, various industries have since come to define the term in their own contexts. According to IBM, a digital twin “is a virtual representation of a physical object or system across its lifecycle, using real-time data to enable understanding, learning and reasoning.” Siemens adds to that the ability of a digital twin “to simulate, predict, and optimize the product and production system before investing in physical prototypes and assets.”

In the planning context, we are mainly talking about digital twins of entire cities. According to Arup, “the promise of the city digital twin is to help provide a simulation environment, to test policy options, bring out dependencies and allow for collaboration across policy areas, whilst improving engagement with citizens and communities.”

Advancements in technology for smart cities—such as the deployment of information communication technology, sensors, and the Internet of Things—enable us to collect data about pretty much every movement, flow, or activity in a city. The availability of this data, combined with increased computing power and artificial intelligence, can allow for the digitalization of entire cities.

The synergy of these technologies essentially leads to the development of smart city digital twins (download the *PAS Quicknotes* on SCDTs at [bit.ly/3auLewJ](https://bit.ly/3auLewJ)). SCDTs can improve decision-making processes and allow for simulation and experimentation with real-time data.

Digital twin technology is relatively new to planners, as are smart city applications. But this shift signals the end of our days of limited experimentation. Planners have the chance to go beyond simulations that can only focus on isolated questions due to limited capabilities. While not quite mainstream yet, according to ABI Research, by 2025 more than 500 city digital



### SCENARIO PLANNING IN BOULDER, COLORADO

Don't think that smaller cities aren't also venturing into the world of digital twins. Boulder is using ArcGIS Urban by Esri, a program that “enables the creation of on-the-fly scenarios to help visualize the areas that would be impacted by proposed urban developments.” Boulder has previously spoken about how its digital twin is taking local scenario planning to a whole new level—for instance, cutting down a complex 400-hour workflow to a simpler three-step process.

twins will be deployed globally. So planners can expect digital replicas of entire cities and their systems sooner rather than later—that is, if they're ready to take the first steps.

### Why city digital twins matter

In general, planners need to take advantage of tools that can make their work more agile. (This idea is gaining traction; read more about it in a February blog post: [bit.ly/3quRV7n](https://bit.ly/3quRV7n).) In the case of city digital twins, being able to quickly test ideas and make necessary adjustments before finalizing planning and policy decisions can allow planners to keep up with the accelerated pace of change that characterizes our world.

City digital twins can improve planning activities such as public engagement, scenario planning, and zoning and development. They have the potential to assist planners in reaching local climate resilience, economic development, and housing goals (just to name a few).

Another added benefit is the ability of city digital twin platforms to foster collaboration between planning organizations and other city departments and agencies.

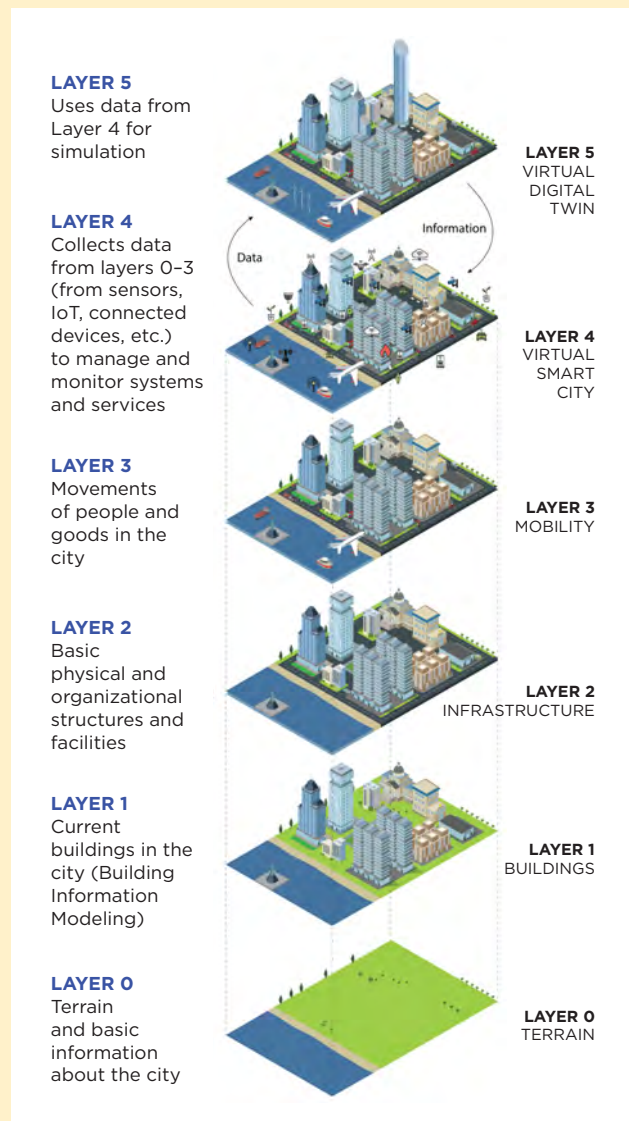
The city digital twin can serve as the site where all city data lives: environmental indicators, resource consumption, zoning regulations, total housing units, transportation patterns. Undertaking a city digital twin project can prompt cities to standardize data from multiple areas in a single repository and share it across their various initiatives and programs, promoting cross-departmental experimentation that better understands interdependencies between policies and infrastructure systems.

Scenario planning has always allowed planners to make sense of uncertain futures. Digitally exploring potential impacts through city digital twins can minimize uncertainty. While planners strive to consider all aspects before moving forward, we know it's common for some things to slip through the cracks due to lack of time or budget. Using a city digital twin can reduce risks by giving planners the opportunity to notice something before it's too late.

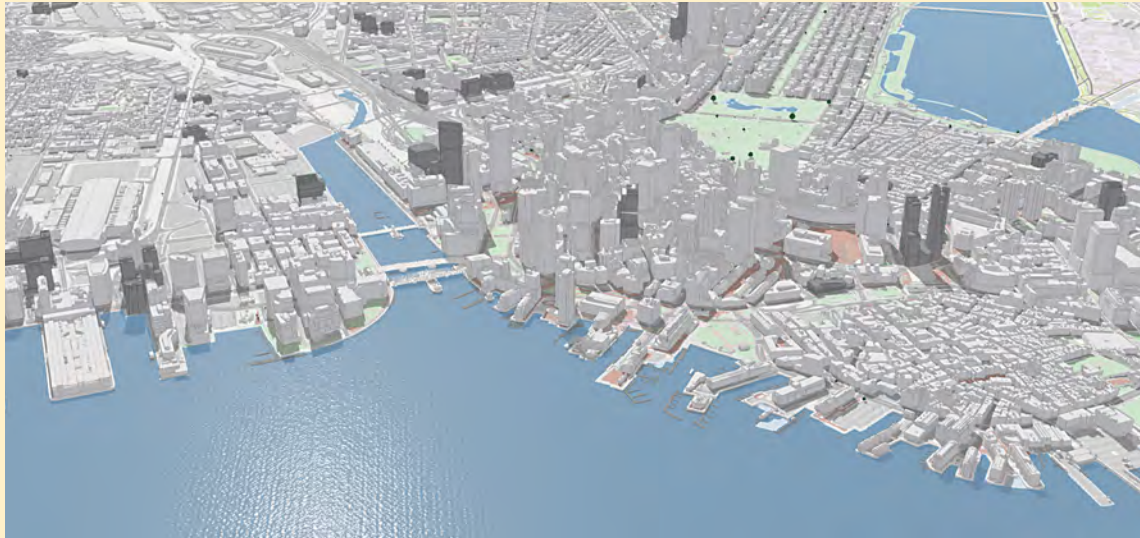
And being able to holistically assess the viability of ideas can encourage planners to think outside the box. Decision makers may often

## DESIGNING THE SMART CITY DIGITAL TWIN

A smart city digital twin relies on a number of layers of data that build on top of each other, layering in information about the terrain, buildings, infrastructure, mobility, and IoT devices. The digital twin uses the data generated in the virtual smart city layer to perform additional simulations; this information is fed back through the layers of the model, where it can be implemented in the physical world.



SOURCE: "A DIGITAL TWIN SMART CITY FOR CITIZEN FEEDBACK" ([BIT.LY/3Q0KXE2](https://bit.ly/3Q0KXE2))



In the past, developers contributed a physical model of their project to the wooden model of downtown Boston (below). Now they have to contribute a digital model, too—especially helpful in neighborhoods beyond downtown.

## COMBINING THE OLD AND THE NEW IN BOSTON

*The city's 3-D smart model—a precursor to a fully functioning SCDT—helps envision neighborhood goals.*

**BOSTON HAS BEEN SEEING** a lot of development in the last few years. Now this historic city needs to be able to quickly visualize the impact of approved and proposed projects on its beloved landscape.

Experimenting with zoning and development hasn't always been easy. Before the 3-D smart model came around, planners had to rely on the "typical" block as the site of their analyses—no doubt missing out on the nuances of unique neighborhoods.

"Now we can actually apply new [zoning and development] rules to a whole neighborhood and see what the impact is before making a decision," says Kennan Rhyne, AICP, interim deputy director of downtown and neighborhood planning for the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA).

Besides handling the famous shadow study for 115 Withrop Square in 2017, in which a



proposed structure cast too much shadow on the Boston Common, other ways the agency has used its 3-D smart model include viewshed and line-of-sight analyses. BPDA has also used its city digital twin to measure the impacts of developments on parking, energy use, carbon emissions, and waste. Carolyn Bennett, deputy director of GIS for BPDA, hopes to advance planning workflows by integrating developers' project submissions seamlessly into the smart model, and also eventually designing the model to be able to conduct suitability and

growth capacity analyses.

The city also uses its 3-D smart model to keep a historical record of the city's changing landscape, which can capture the local planning and development story. "We see the value in documenting the historical changes in the city in our digital model. It's helpful to us to be able to track" how the city has evolved over time, Bennett says.

This means that within the main model, they can see active, historical, and proposed structures. They even have alternative models of structures, which shows how a proposed development may have been altered over time.

The model helps the city—planners and decision makers, as well as residents—tell the story of the place, showing how planning and development has changed over time. More to the point, it can help all Bostonians imagine potential new futures. —*Alexandra Gomez*



reject projects or policy ideas because they are unfamiliar terrain or because they're just too risky to even consider. City digital twins can remove the need to devote valuable time and resources to experimenting with ideas that end up being impractical or poorly received. This low-risk, low-cost experimentation leads to time and money saved in the long term.

### Data fairness and equity

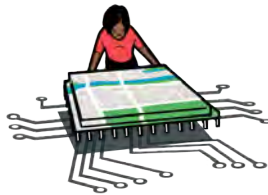
Digital twins are simulating everything that is happening in the real-world smart city. Almost. As with any digital tool, planners have to be mindful of unintentionally reproducing inequalities from the analog world in the digital world.

No matter how “big” data might be, it isn't perfect. The three Vs of big data traditionally include volume, velocity, and variety. Planning for fair and equitable outcomes requires planners to add value and validity to the mix.

Data that feeds into city digital twins primarily comes from smart city applications, online devices, and sensors. That means anything or anyone not connected to (or recognized by) these technologies will likely be missing from the dataset. And these gaps in the data can hinder the success of a project. Even worse, data gaps can also be severely and disproportionately harmful to those who are left out. It is imperative to know where data comes from, how it was collected, and who and what it might exclude.

Planners should use city digital twins to embrace the diversity that lives within a city, and this starts with having equity in mind from the beginning. As we already know, different population groups will have different needs. Recognizing the inaccuracy and incompleteness of the datasets is crucial.

For instance, mobility data collected from location services typically only includes people who move through the city carrying smart devices, like smartphones. This approach often excludes children, the elderly, and unbanked people, leaving cities with an incomplete picture of the community. Cities need to work to fill data gaps through inclusionary approaches, like sharing data findings with residents to verify it and working directly with on-the-ground community groups to gather additional data.



### FURTHER IMPACTS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The deployment of AI systems is growing, but the decision-making capabilities of algorithms and AI programs can reinforce discriminatory planning practices.



This research was developed in partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. The Lincoln Institute runs the Consortium for Scenario Planning, which provides technical assistance, educational resources, and access to a network of fellow innovators.

#### VISIT

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“You have to overcome data gaps by really listening to people and questioning whether your source of data is representative of their lives and experience, says Nayeli Rodriguez, Technologist for the Public Realm at the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics in Boston.

To ensure smarter, more complete base data that supports a smart city digital twin, cities need high-quality data governance. Boston has shown its commitment to responsible data use and governance, adopting an initial set of data trust principles that communicate that data isn't just for governments and institutions. The city wants to equip city staff and residents with the tools and knowledge to use data effectively.

“We want to draw residents’ attention more and more to these systems that collect data,” she says. “Not only because it helps them to safeguard their own privacy and data, but it will also guide us as planners to make better decisions that are more representative of what residents want out of the city.”

As more and more cities start to develop their own digital twins, the tool could extend far beyond its current uses. Cities facing threats from coastal and riverine flooding might be looking for a way to simulate future flooding events, comprehensively manage risks, and rapidly create recovery plans. And many cities are still figuring out how to meet public engagement requirements during a pandemic or other public health crises. Digital twins can help stakeholders visualize projects and developments, even in remote situations.

Others could employ smart city digital twins as a visualization tool, illustrating policies and plans to decision makers and the public, or as a way to gather feedback to support the cocreation of plans.

Regardless of how they are used, the central purpose of city digital twins is helping planners to create great communities for all. From climate adaptation and resilience planning to creative public engagement, city digital twins are flexible, agile, and promising tools to streamline planning processes and increase productivity in planning organizations.

*Petra Hurtado is APA's research director. Alexandra Gomez is a research associate at APA.*



## THE VILLAGE OF SHELBURNE FALLS

*Shelburne and Buckland, Massachusetts*

**TWO TOWNS SHARE** the Village of Shelburne Falls, a haven for artists and artisans in the Northeast Berkshire Mountains. The towns also share a joint master plan and a business association that fosters economic development, planning, and community events. Shelburne Falls is a National Register Historic District, and local initiatives and zoning codes encourage the preservation of the village's pedestrian- and bike-friendly historic layout and adaptive reuse of the original buildings. Learn more about this Great Place in America at [planning.org/greatplaces/neighborhoods/2018/shelburne](https://planning.org/greatplaces/neighborhoods/2018/shelburne).

The 400-foot-long Bridge of Flowers over the Deerfield River connects the towns of Buckland and Shelburne. The former trolley bridge was converted into a garden in 1929. It now attracts thousands of visitors from around the world every year.



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