



Lessons for the Future

Planning & Development Services

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Introduction

The purpose of this white paper is to discuss the experiences of the Planning & Development Services cohort [1¹] for Local Government 2030, and begin the discussions for national and localized solutions to the NAPA Grand Challenges found most urgent. Planning is at once pervasive and immaterial, with clear impacts on daily lives, and yet many may never even realize how it influences nearly all aspects of a community. The American Planning Association defines planning in the following way:

“The goal of planning is to maximize the health, safety, and economic well-being of all people living in our communities. This involves thinking about how we can move around our community, how we can attract and retain thriving businesses, where we want to live, and opportunities for recreation. Planning helps create communities of lasting value.

While architects often focus on a single building, a planner's job is to work with residents and elected officials to guide the layout of an entire community or region. Planners take a broad view and look at how the pieces of a community — buildings, roads, and parks — fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Planners then make recommendations on how the community should proceed.” (American Planning Association, 2022)

But what is the value of planning and community development to the local government mandate as a steward of democracy and the public's interest? What role does it serve within the wider purpose of government, or within society itself? Despite lofty ambitions, and honorable goals, Community Development in the 21st Century is still confronting its liability from decades of harm caused to communities, primarily communities of color (Rothstein, 2018). Discriminatory zoning between multifamily and single-family properties, redlining, and the siting of environmentally sensitive land uses next to communities of color (otherwise known as environmental justice as outlined in Executive Order 12898 (FEMA, 2022)) have all weakened public trust in the planning process. Given the history of these harmful practices, it is only fitting that planners prioritize addressing these issues in the future.

Building codes, and the permits that authorize the construction that conforms to them, can be seen as an annoyance, an added cost and complexity that doesn't improve a project. A homeowner or developer seeking to “get something built” may find it easier to lay blame at the feet of the public servant who is “preventing” something, rather than an architect, engineer, or contractor who isn't meeting a code. Those in the building safety and zoning fields know that this is not the case. Building and zoning codes are implemented for the good of the community that adopted them. This disconnect leads to

¹ Note that this paper uses the terms “planning,” “development services,” “community development,” and others interchangeably. This reflects the diverse backgrounds of the cohort submitting the paper, as well as the varied makeup of the profession and function within local government.

further mistrust in the government, the ordinances adopted by city councils, and the public servants who enforce them.

As local governments strive to address the Grand Challenges, certain key challenges rise to the top as planning's distinct hurdles to realigning the planning profession's responsibilities with the public's needs. The cardinal Grand Challenges include the obligations to **restore trust in local government** and **reinvigorate the public workforce** by reinforcing the value of innovative planners for facilitating inclusive community improvements that serve current and future residents. This course correction for the planning & development services field requires planners to pivot away from bureaucratic pencil-pushing in favor of entrepreneurial and energetic policy reforms that prioritize solutions to additional Grand Challenges and adapt the field to confront the emerging technological, environmental, economic and administrative realities of the twenty-first century.

These mandate-related Grand Challenges that will define the planning profession include:

- *Steward natural resources and address climate change* by guiding development in an environmentally sensitive manner, and by using the planning process to develop environmentally just plans.
- *Create modern water systems for safe and sustainable use* by planning for water usage, updating and enforcing codes as necessary to reflect best practices, and using economic development strategies to empower startups.
- *Build resilient communities* by designing for hazard adaptation and mitigation.
- *Connect individuals to meaningful work* throughout efforts in economic development and transportation planning.
- *Foster social equity* through our professional commitment to inclusivity and access.
- *Advancing the Nation's Long-Term Fiscal Health* with local governments leading the charge to facilitate the flow of people and goods across communities and continents.

This paper makes the case that *Community Development* brings value to people, projects, and places. We position ourselves as an essential service, with a body of professionals best positioned to empower residents to think big and to implement their visions in a democratic, efficient and prudent manner. The skills our profession provides go beyond the technical. We are communicators, strategists, and educators.

While acknowledging the historical harms and mistakes made within the profession, we assert that planning's core community development function plays a key role in making communities great, and is essential to solving the Grand Challenges of the twenty-first century. Within the context of coming to terms with these prior happenings, planning is evolving to understand that the best types of plans are those created by and with communities, rather than for them. The role of the planner has adjusted from that of the technocrat to that of the great facilitator. One who listens to various community stakeholders, analyzes and synthesizes their needs, wants, and ideas to co-create plans with a greater likelihood of implementation thanks to the increased buy-in created by high levels of community involvement. (Levy, 2016).

Vision for the Future of Planning and Development Services

The twenty-first century has introduced significant technological enhancements that have revolutionized the ways that goods and information flow across the globe. While many private sector industries have embraced innovation to future-proof their operations, the majority of Town Halls have been slow to accommodate for change and are frequently averse to accepting risks that accompany deviations from the Traditional Model. While each Town Hall faces a unique set of challenges, a set of significant Grand Challenges stands out as the notable obstacles that planners must confront in their service to the public. Planning and development will need to continue to take the broadest view of their communities, given the rapidly changing nature of any region due to climate change or mercurial socioeconomic conditions that can redirect a municipality's trajectory. Fitting together the puzzle pieces will become more difficult and even more essential to effective planning in the coming decades.

Visioning is a key element of a planning document, one that takes the voices of a community and seeks to represent their hopes, dreams, and desires for their community as it develops. It is a future-forward statement that refines the public's desires into an actionable strategy that maintains and improves the local quality of life. As delegates for Planning / Community Development at the Local Government 2030 convening, let this white paper serve as our vision statement. Let it represent our greatest ambitions for progress within our sector, and let it guide our efforts to fulfill those ambitions.

Current Challenges

Technological innovations have significantly altered how planners work, communicate, organize and understand their roles in representing and facilitating initiatives on the public's behalf. The advent of Facebook and Zoom as community outreach platforms have expanded the opportunities for planners to engage with the public and gather information, however, this optimized accessibility comes with an expanded visibility for planning professionals that now must serve as representatives for their community, their Town Hall, and their established policies. This enhanced visibility creates a tradeoff for planners as they represent the administrators telling people by maintaining the rules while simultaneously seeking to move the community forward by implementing policy reforms and generating momentum on initiatives that can address local issues for a better quality of life.

This divergence helps characterize the role of a planner and clarifies why local governments need planners to serve as administrators and innovators that work to facilitate the ordered transition of a community in order to concurrently serve the needs of current residents and accommodate for future development. This role as an administrator and changemaker also positions planners in a high-visibility role to mediate disputes between opposing interest groups which forces a planner to operate in the crossfire navigating between public and private stakeholders and interests. That obligation mandates that planners 'pick their battles' in recommending key policy reforms and operate in a political capacity to seek buy-in on a range of planning focus areas and establishes a long-term process that incorporates dozens of constituent projects to implement key changes in a community.

The Planning Office

The role of the planning office within a local government's organizational structure can be understood by the constituent units that report to the Planning Director with a great deal of variation between town halls. Many Planning & Development Services offices frequently contain a planning division that oversees and enforces compliance with the adopted zoning regulations, a building division that serves the public by inspecting the safety and integrity of buildings, and an economic development division that aims to attract investment to the community by marketing available properties, supporting commercial growth and representing the municipality as a partner to the private sector. While the organizational structure of each planning and community development office is distinct, across the profession there is a shared mandate to identify and implement the community's requested quality of life improvements. Together with a common goal of keeping the jurisdiction modern, accessible, and safe, these divisions are required to approve all new construction within the jurisdiction's limits.

Zoning

Often maligned by contractors and developers, zoning serves as a vehicle for scaling the community's geographic and population growth at a manageable pace to accommodate for infrastructure, financial and economic constraints. Originating from a desire to separate "nuisances," zoning is intended to organize growth in a manner that directs new development toward land that can support its highest and best uses while also protecting the public's interests for health & safety, environmental sustainability, and access to other essential services.

The Building Division

Public safety is the basis for the building division. The local building division ensures and mandates that buildings are built or renovated according to minimum safety standards through the plan review and permit issuance process. Building Officials are heavily technical oriented with their focus strictly on building safety, codes, and standards.

Building codes long played a role in the administration of local government, with the first documented building code in the Book of Hammurabi circa 1772 BCE. This code was rather drastic in stating that "If a builder built a house for a man and his work is not strong, and if the house he has built, falls in and kills the householder, that builder shall be slain". Now the consequences for poor building tactics in the building codes are slightly less drastic. However the need for building codes are stronger than ever. With the skyrocketing prices of construction materials, many may be looking to cut corners wherever they can and this can lead to improper and unsafe building techniques. Without the benefit of the building division, buildings can be built with unsafe measures, including not just the risk of collapse, but higher risk of fire, faster fire spread throughout the building materials, lack of proper egress for occupants, and inability to accommodate accessible residents.

The Economic Development Division

Economic development represents a broad discipline of planning & development services with each jurisdiction requiring a tailored strategy to enhance the economic well-being of the community. Planners that focus on economic development are frequently charged with serving as a catalyst to attract investment in their municipality by keeping existing buildings occupied with employers and stimulating the creation of new jobs and housing units.

Planners focusing on economic development must also serve as a liaison to the corporate community and work with businesses, small and large, to relocate their operations and jobs to the local area. This charge positions economic development professionals with analyzing and addressing key problems that limit existing ventures from expanding their operations in the community or attracting

additional companies to invest in their jurisdictions. Important information that economic development planners focus on to increase investment in their communities include land use considerations (zoning, location, values), the conditions and capacity of infrastructure, and the community's ability to support a growing employment base with adequate parking, accessible housing options and an appealing quality of life.

One significant feature of the economic development planner's role is directly represented in NAPA's Grand Challenge to **Connect Individuals to Meaningful Work**. If an economic planner has successfully achieved their goal, they will attract individuals to relocate to the community for stable employment and additionally build wealth with an affordable cost of living. This positions the economic development planner as the bridge between the public and private sectors with a responsibility to represent residents' interests while also collaborating with business leaders and real estate developers to enable local investment opportunities. To effectively represent the community's interests, economic development officials must be well-versed in community engagement and strategic planning to operationalize the public's needs. One must also be experienced in dealmaking and partnership building to build the capital stack of funds needed to advance an initiative.

The Planning Commission

Municipal planners are often tasked with staffing their community's Plan Commission (sometimes referred to as a Planning Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission, or other names). This is typically an appointed body responsible for making recommendations to elected officials on topics such as site plan approval for new development, amendments to zoning codes (often referred to as a zoning text amendment) which change which uses are permitted within certain districts, or the required bulk regulations (i.e. setbacks from lot lines, maximum building heights), or zoning map amendments (rezonings, where a property has its zoning district changed).

It is typically at these commissions where the legally required public hearing is held. This is the part of the process where notice is served on nearby property owners (by mail, newspaper, and a sign on the subject property) and all are invited to provide input into a project. What are the Challenges this process faces? In their 2019 book *Neighborhood Defenders, Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis* Einstein, Glick, and Palmer discuss (Einstein, et al., 2019) how this process is often weaponized by communities in opposition to the construction of new housing. Lawsuits are threatened and often filed, even ones with a low likelihood of winning just to delay projects in the hopes that a developer will lose interest. Residents organize (known as NIMBYs, for Not In My Backyard) to speak at length during these meetings. Appointed Commissioners, working in a voluntary capacity, are often unequipped to handle this kind of public pressure from their neighbors. (Einstein, et al., 2019). From a staff perspective, this means long nights, fraught emotions, and tense confrontations.

There is often a key misunderstanding where development is concerned. Residents think in terms of "what is the city doing?" [\[2\]](#). The perception is often of the municipality as the driver of all development, rather than the reviewer of development spurred by private market forces. When at a public hearing, the planner is often the face of the municipality. When that public hearing is for a development that sparks a local resistance, the planner can often come under heavy criticism. Accusations of bribery, misdeeds, ethical failures, and dereliction of duty are not uncommon. Media

articles that never seem to recognize the reality that a zoning application must be processed and granted its public hearing no matter the opinion of the staff planner. Phone calls, resident meetings, and hurtful social media comments are not unheard of. This can be off putting to young professionals considering a career. Without dignity in the discourse, community development risks losing skilled and motivated talent to careers that are less combative, and more likely to provide a sense of actually getting things done.

Addressing the Grand Challenges

Modernize and Reinvigorate the Public Service

The public's view on local government has ramifications for the Grand Challenges of *Modernize and Reinvigorate the Public Service*, as the public service consists of more than just the professional staff. Planners are not decision makers, and often are just providing support to volunteer groups of elected and appointed officials. This harsh reality can be dismaying to young planners, filled with idealism about the communities they want to create. Career talks at planning career programs can be filled with sheepish “well, it isn't all Jane Jacobs and Complete Streets,” or “it's nothing like in school, a lot of what you're doing is just working through checklists.” While nobody would argue for a return to the system that saw planners go unchecked by the public they serve, perhaps professionals need to once again feel empowered to be bold, to serve their communities by acknowledging their expertise, an expertise that compliments that of the local residents who know their community better than anyone.

What can result from a planner who doesn't feel empowered to make recommendations to their community? Stagnation and a status quo. Projects are reviewed only in terms of their most tangible effects such as noise and traffic, while long term consequences such as fiscal impact, availability of affordable housing, and stimulation of meaningful work can go ignored. While planning is a participatory process, great care should be given to avoid turning a public hearing into an exercise in direct democracy where a commissioner simply counts the “ayes and nays” in the audience. Typically participation in this process is a matter of privilege. For example, many states require notice to be served to property owners, rather than those occupying the property, meaning renters are often missed from the hearing. Indeed, the time commitment of serving as a Commissioner often results in Commissions that do not reflect their communities, often consisting of older landowners who have the time and resources to serve. (Einstein, et al., 2019)

What solutions can be found? Firstly, efforts must be made to train elected and appointed officials. Many state chapters of the American Planning Association have plan commission training available (APA Illinois, 2022), and in some states such as Wisconsin, this training is a requirement at the state level. Planners must be prepared to work closely with their elected and appointed officials, keep them informed of best practices and a holistic view of the communities they serve. While staff planners must remain apolitical, they must be aware of the political environment within which they operate.

Efforts to reinvigorate our democracy will also have implications for the development review process. When appointed commissioners and elected officials do not represent the communities they serve, either demographically or in viewpoint, then development does not represent the best interests of that community. Time commitments for public meetings, and the pre-work (site visits, reading staff reports) can exclude great numbers of people from fulfilling such positions. The regular schedule of Plan Commission meetings, for example, excludes those who work shifts and thus cannot guarantee availability on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The costs associated with running a campaign precludes many from seeking elected office. Until these fundamental structural issues are addressed, the composition of these boards, committees, and commissions are unlikely to change any

time soon. Local governments must prioritize accessibility for these positions in 2030, and ensure that all those who wish to serve their communities are able to do so. While there is a value to the stability brought by long serving board members, it cannot come at the cost of innovation, representation, and inclusion.

Restore Trust in Local Government - Engagement

As NAPA mentions in their 12 Grand Challenges paper, governments are largely reactive and not proactive. Government has long been the one to wait for something to happen before beginning to develop a solution. Take the Berkeley Balcony collapse that occurred in June 2015, the Miami Condo collapse of 2021[1], or even earlier examples of fires in the Chicago area. This had the effect of altering building codes and fire codes and enacting local inspection ordinances of exterior elevated elements. However, how long did it take for the codes to change and the ordinances/policies to take effect? The City of West Sacramento was among the earlier jurisdictions to get their Exterior Elevated Elements program going, sparked from the Berkeley Balcony collapse, however their program did not begin until late 2017. Almost two years later. Why?

How can we move to make local governments more agile? It begins with public engagement. Part of the local government's slowness is that our duty is to show the residents where the money is going. The majority of the income we receive is from our taxpayers, therefore they play a large part in our thought process with regard to innovation. We hesitate to jump on the newest technology for fear of failure. If it goes wrong, we wasted those funds, how do we explain that to our residents? Will they see it as superfluous or unnecessary? Will the public approve this measure to obtain funding for an initiative?

The answer? Altering the way local governments communicate with their residents. The public needs to know the why in order to understand the how. For example, a young couple comes to the community development counter. They want to get an idea of the fees they would pay for permits to build their first home. They've found a lot for sale on the north end of town. It seems like a cheaper way for them to be able to find housing in this crazy real estate market. This couple watches as the counter technician combs through the available handouts and pulls out two rather large fee books. "Some light reading for you," the technician jokes as they hand the books to the young potential homeowners. They then go on to explain to the couple that without more information regarding exactly what will be built and the way permitting fees are calculated, they will not be able to provide an exact estimate, but they can provide the couple with the two large fee books that contains all of the information needed to create their own fee quote for the needed permits. That is, if they can understand how to perform the calculations, where the lot is in relation to the subdivision maps provided, and fee descriptions to know if the fee is applicable to their project. After seeing the overwhelmed blank look in this couple's eyes, the counter tech decides to go through the pages one by one with them. Almost an hour later, the tech has finished highlighting and explaining. That couple who entered the room with such excitement, now knows that their permits will run them around 100k for permit costs. Defeated at the added cost, they walk away. It will be too expensive to build their home.

Preparation and prior knowledge are key to any development project. The information is out there, as shown by the large fee books that just about every jurisdiction has and was provided to our

fictitious potential home builders. The problem lies in the information's digestibility. As local public servants, if we want to become more agile, more connected and engaged with our constituents, we need a way to get the public informed about these items, and improve our communication and accountability. As our systems become more complex, our ability to communicate these systems must in turn become more direct.

The public needs the information, many if not all, do not have time to read through pages and pages of staff reports, council agendas, impact fee assessments, etc. We, as governing bodies, need to come up with ways to get that information to them in the simplest way possible. The information needs to be provided in ways that the government savvy all the way to the young adult with a new idea for a restaurant can read, understand, and prepare for the fiscal impacts of their permitting fees. Being more understandable, more clear, and more upfront with the impact fees will be a small step in helping to change the public's view of government. The more we interact with our residents, the more they begin to see us as human and not as this looming overreaching governing body.

Fees are just one misconception the public has regarding the planning/building development process. By the time the applicant gets to the building permit counter, they aren't excited anymore. From the large-scale developers that have had to deal with zoning issues, planning issues, and even the design review process. To the code enforcement case property owners that have had to deal with Notices to Abate being sent to their property, code enforcement officers at their door, and potentially extra fines for unpermitted work. Once the applicant reaches the building counter, they have gone from being excited about their project and ideas to being grumpy, stressed out, and questioning their choices that brought them here.

Take, for example, the following story. A Building Official sits down in an afternoon meeting with a building inspector, a code enforcement officer, and a member of the economic development team. Minutes later, in walks the reason for the meeting, the new owner of a local grocery store who has done some major renovations without any building permits. The team goes through the photos of the code enforcement officer's inspection, and outlines the work that the tenant has done which would require a permit. The grocery store owner is told needs to provide the building department with a full set of construction plans that show the details of all the work that has been done. In addition, due to the fact this is a commercial space, these plans are required to be drawn by an architect, or a registered design professional. Plans done by a registered design professional cost more than those drawn by a contractor or draftsman. The Building Official is not asking for this, because they are trying to charge him more money, in fact, the jurisdiction doesn't see a dime of the money that this gentleman will pay his design professional to draw these plans. However, our grocery store owner does not know that, or he may actually know this but deep in this heated moment to him, it looks like the local government is simply throwing up roadblocks. To this gentleman, it looks like we are unwilling to help him, to work with him. From the government's perspective, they are helping him as typically one would never see a Building Official, code enforcement officer, economic development representative, and building inspector sit down with the individual code enforcement cases. Yet there they are, gathered in one room, going through the inspection photos, one at a time and telling this tenant exactly what he needs to show in his plans when he submits for this required building permit.

The tenant, like most members of the public, does not see it that way. He mentions to the Building Official that he is just trying to make the space better for our residents, he is a small business owner, and does not have the money to hire a professional and have a set of plans drawn up, let alone pull the required permit. He offers to just “pay for the permit” so that the jurisdiction can inspect his work and he will change whatever they tell him to change.

Local governments aren't there to just collect money from this gentleman. How do we, as a jurisdiction, explain to this man that this is all in the name of safety and it is not a situation where we just take his money and offer an inspection. How do we, as public servants, change the narrative from overreaching government money grab to the real reason for involvement, zoning codes, building codes, safety for both store owners and their patrons?

To add further confusion and frustration to the mix, at the end of the year the building codes will change. International Code Council Building codes are updated every three years and subsequently adopted by local jurisdictions across the nation shortly thereafter. These updates always get more stringent, adding more requirements for energy usage requirements, accessibility upgrades, etc. The code updates are necessary and not for frivolity though. In addition to making spaces safer, more accessible to all, and more energy efficient, an unintended consequence is causing the cost of construction to increase with each passing code cycle. Back to the business owner with the unpermitted construction, if he does not get his application in prior to the end of the year, he will be forced to adhere to the new codes that take effect in January.

We need to alter the public's view of governance and engagement with local governments if we wish to continue enforcing these ever-changing building codes. We need to alter the public view of governance and their engagement with local governments. If we wish to continue enforcing these ever-changing building codes.

Connecting individuals with Meaningful Employment

Planning and Development Service Counters across the country are facing a workforce shortage. Many of the current staff are aging out and are or already have been retiring. Perceptions of public employment may mean that private sector work is seen as more glamorous and higher paid. This further frustrates the public, as due to a lack of staff response times from their local government can be prolonged. From the public's point of view, with the lack of response and stringent requirements, the government is not there to help, but rather to throw up those “roadblocks” to their construction projects. Also, due to a lack of staff, less inspectors are out on the roads each day to catch contractors in action performing illegal work. This further fosters the public's current view when someone who was issued a stop work order and is being penalized for their illegal work without a permit comes to the counter and lists off neighbors, or others in the city who have also done work without a permit.

So, how do we change our engagement with the public and therefore our roles as government? How do we boost the employment prospects for the planning and development services counter? The

best and most direct way would be through outreach and education of the residents of our jurisdiction. We need to develop programs to educate our residents from a very young age. By developing and re-inventing more modernized programs on a national level, such as “bring your child to work day”, will educate the young generation on career prospects that are not widely and commonly known to those at a young age. By organizing regular national bring your child to work days for the elementary school children and internship opportunities for high schoolers and college students, we will get the younger generation involved. Allowing the next generation of potential public servants to see public service and local government from the inside perspective rather than from a subjective outside and potentially uninformed perspective.

In addition to educating the young on careers in local government, another need is for the development of programs for teaching owner builders about code requirements, zoning requirements, city ordinances, and the overall intent of these requirements. The goal is for the residents to not only learn about the specific requirements of our building codes /ordinances, but to also learn the background and reasonings for these items. Ideally a program of this design, would assist the public with providing either direction in selecting licensed professionals, draftsman, contractors, or it would also provide them with the basic skills to be able to draft their own construction documents correctly, and in a manner that provides all the detailed information required to obtain a building permit.

Additional outreach programs should include help for those who need assistance in correcting building code violations. Similar to a program such as Habitat for Humanity, this program would be supported through the local government having authority. This program could be spearheaded through the code enforcement officers, since they are the ones that are dealing directly with those in violation.

The true solution to altering the public view and to course-correcting the way local governments engage with their residents is through transparency. The common theme that was found in this issue is miss information and miss communication. By being as transparent as possible with our residents, it will be easier for them to see that the entire goal of the community development department, building division, is safety, and not government overreach.

By altering the public’s view, and by educating our young, we will be able to boost the industry with experienced staff, thereby further, showing our residents that we are there to help by providing increased shortened response times and more consistent enforcement on violators.

While having the media involved as well would certainly help it is not a requirement to complete our mission. We do not need to create some sort of outlandish propaganda to feed the media, but rather move towards being completely transparent and forthcoming regarding our intent. Combine transparency with education regarding upcoming building/zoning requirements and we will begin to renew the public’s trust in Government.

Focus on Affordable Housing

The affordability of housing within an area can and does have a direct impact on connections to meaningful employment. While zoning can be seen as an established set of regulations to highlight areas of the community that can best accommodate new development, zoning is also often identified as a restrictive barrier that improperly constrains growth to the detriment of lower-income populations being priced out or siloed away to create segregated neighborhoods. According to the National Low

Income Housing Coalition, on a national scale, “only 36 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households”.

While well thought out, masterplanned communities can offer many benefits to their residents, there are often unintended consequences of zoning as it related to the affordability of land and housing. Zoning decisions are often made by an entrenched landowner class who may prioritize the preservation of land values over the accessibility of housing.

Many believe that quality, affordable housing is a basic human right. However, there are many factors as to why our nation is facing an affordable housing shortage and why many Americans are not afforded this right. Such factors include, but are not limited to, population growth, land supply, the economy, interest rates, financing options, government regulations and policies, property taxes, and fees. Thus, local governments should reassess their current policies and programs to make affordable housing more attainable for their communities. In addition to evaluating policies and programs, local governments should review all publicly owned land. More often than not, government agencies find that vacant land, dilapidated properties, and underutilized properties can be used for affordable housing development. This strategy and re-evaluation of government owned land to provide housing for a large but underrepresented population could begin as a small stepping stone to restore trust in local governments.

Another tool underused by many municipalities is seeking out Public-Private partnerships to address affordable housing. An added bonus for local municipalities is that financial institutions and companies are becoming more interested in socially responsible investment opportunities inside the communities that they serve. Corporations such as Apple, Google, and Amazon have pledged billions of dollars to address the housing needs in their local communities. Public-Private partnerships are a good solution to support moderate-income level workers, such as teachers, police officers, nurses, and etc.. Indeed, many advocates and planning policy makers are using the term “workforce housing” in lieu of “affordable housing” due to the negative connotations of the latter. Municipalities working with real estate private equity investors, non-profit organizations, financial institutions, or other institutional investors will surely begin to address the preservation, acquisition, and construction of affordable housing projects.

The work of affordable housing can touch numerous departments on the city level. Most of these departments are often working in silos. Thus, it can become increasingly difficult for cities to make quick and rational decisions regarding the work of affordable housing, leading it to be rather exhausting for developers and other agencies working to move projects through the development process. Meeting with all interested departments and streamlining permitting processes while having up-to-date communication systems on the city level can prove to be an effective opportunity for many cities across the United States. Ensuring that all departments are working together and not against each other. Furthermore, this will ensure that developers, agencies, non-profit organizations, and the general public, are able to receive accurate information regarding affordable housing projects being completed in their communities.

Silos and Restoring Trust

Plan reviews, be it for complex new developments down to individual residential additions can involve a lot of staff time and expertise. Often, this can be spread across multiple divisions or departments. All an applicant may see is time. Time, time and money. In an increasingly customer service oriented economy, a “one call solves all” approach is becoming both the expectation and the norm. While the work that local governments do is valuable and necessary, is it possible to streamline some of the work so that external applicants have a single point of contact?

The city of West Sacramento and other Sacramento Area jurisdictions have attempted to quell the siloing of the permit reviewing divisions through a centralized Community Development Department. This looks like a one stop shop type of permitting counter for development related permits. At the City of West Sacramento’s CDD virtual or physical counter, a member of the public can come in and speak with a technician who will be able to assist them throughout their process. These staff members deal with and coordinate all of the individual divisions within community development to help provide a centralized point of contact for the applicants. While these technicians formally are with the building division, due to the nature of their position, they know enough of when to provide the applicant with the contact information of another division member, say planning, transportation, or environmental services. They may also be able to answer generalized common questions the public may have regarding these other divisions.

The counter technicians don’t just answer questions, they issue the permits and bring in the applications. This provides the applicant with a face/contact they can reach out to with any questions throughout the process and know that if they do not know the answer, they will find out who does for them. No more does an applicant have to go to one counter to ensure their project is zoned properly, one counter to pay school fees, one counter to know if they need an encroachment permit, and finally one counter to submit construction drawings for their building permit. Now they can approach the counter, explain their project details, and know that the person on the other side will route this plan and open the needed permit applications for them. It simplifies the process, makes it digestible for an applicant, and provides them with a sense of trust in the person on the other side of the counter.

Restoring Trust, Agility and COVID-19

The societal and community upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic crackled across the globe in early 2020s and leveled a critical hit on the credibility of government at all levels to serve as a reliable and accountable agent for the public’s interests. As officials raced to respond to a predictable, but infrequent global pandemic, Town Halls across the country were poised to embrace significant technological innovations and policy improvements that had remained out of reach for decades and hindered the public service’s abilities break away from the Traditional Model and explore innovations that improve the community’s access to public services.

The pandemic accelerated already necessary change and exacerbated existing problems. This moment is a great opportunity for local governments to innovate in their approach to their workforce and workspace. The pandemic showed that workers can be just as productive at home and have higher levels of satisfaction in their work. Local governments at all levels can lead the push for hybrid work environments for their employees. This moment in time allows us to innovatively look at the services we provide, the workers that do that, and the workspace in which this gets done.

Community Development front desk counters aren't returning to their pre-pandemic levels as more members of the public utilize digital options. Community Development offices should also lean into this lesson and adjust. The workforce can become remote, which would offset hiring challenges due to housing prices if you have a digital review process in place. Municipalities will need to understand that this change isn't necessarily efficient at the beginning and you need time for the process to show improvements. You could also pull in experts on any number of items from around the country when faced with a complex question digitally. These offices should also ensure traditional barriers in diverse hiring are broken down by accommodating more employees within reason.

Local government operations had to quickly pivot and provide some sort of digital/remote operation. With a number of permit and application tracking workflow processes in place, they needed to and will need to transition to a digital process. This digital transition was accelerated by COVID but local governments can use this moment to create real meaningful change to some of the institutional issues marginalized communities face. These transitions aren't easy and take executive leadership commitment and often efficiencies aren't realized until later years. Extreme care must also be taken to ensure data security and privacy rights as the work becomes digital.

In order to remain relevant, and to remain agile with the ever-changing societal conditions, Governments need to stay current with technologies. In the development world, COVID changed everything. Pre-Covid, plans were submitted physically. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent printing numerous copies of plans to submit for plan reviews. On top of the money spent printing these plans, the process for routing the plans, stamping the plans, etc, took up extra man hours.

As most local agencies are reactive, not proactive, moving towards electronic permitting was not on the forefront of their to-do lists. However, the COVID closures put electronic permitting on the fast track, as permits still needed to be issued, construction couldn't stop, but people weren't allowed in the office. Being of the reactive type, many jurisdictions had to "cowboy" their electronic permitting. Many did not have any formal electronic permitting policies or even proper applications to do so, leading to a semi controlled chaos approach to getting construction documents over from the applicants to the jurisdictions for review, stamped approved, and back to the applicants for issuance of permits.

The lack of being able to swiftly alter course, move funds around for purchasing of software/training, and making policy changes has kept many of these jurisdictions from moving towards a more streamlined approach to electronic permitting. This causes missed items or delays due to emails not getting through, folders potentially being deleted on accident, etc. Delays, the appearance of being

unorganized, and technical issues, despite being beyond the jurisdiction's control can cause the applicant's to have further mistrust in the process and their municipality's intentions.

Stewarding Natural Resources, Climate Change and Sustainability

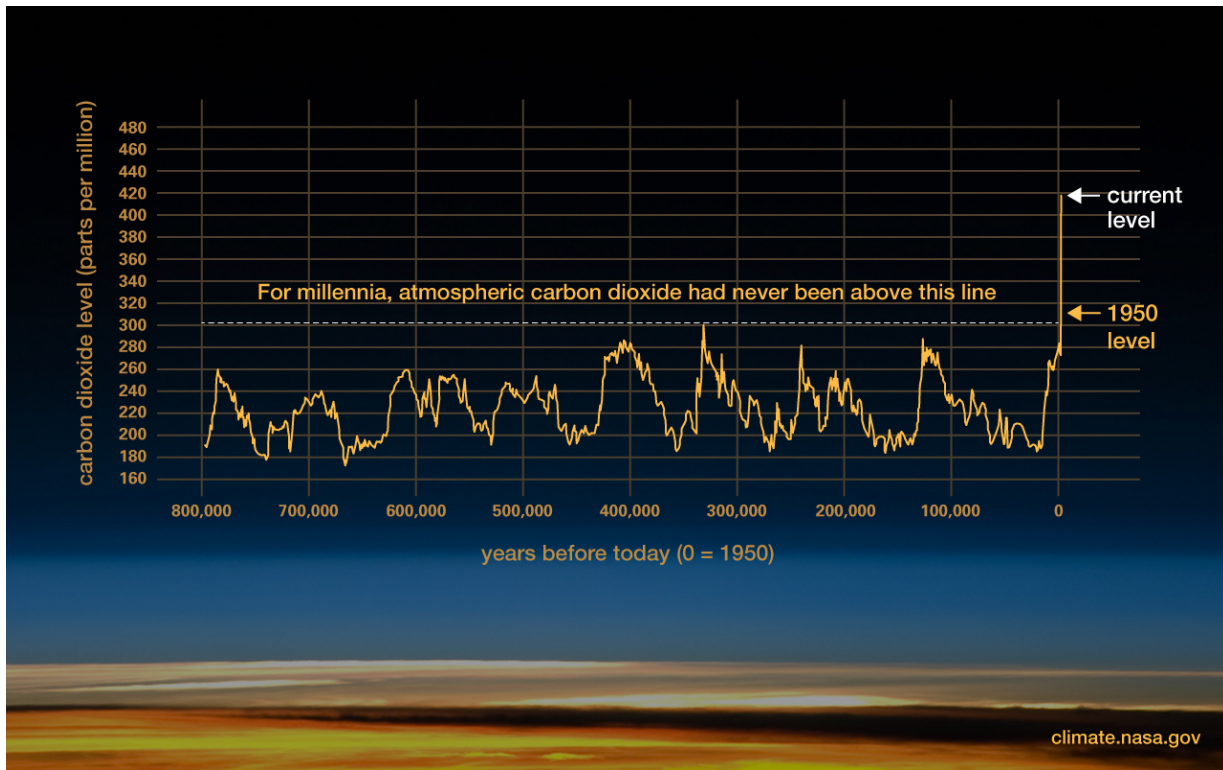


Figure 1. Greenhouse Gas emissions over time. (<https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>)

Local governments are on the front lines of dealing with climate impacts through their climate action plans or resiliency plans. These plans aim to address climate change by setting goals, standards, or programs within a jurisdiction. In recent years, there has been a greater priority placed on these plans and what local governments are doing to curb emissions to slow climate change. It is easy for communities to set goals or standards but much harder to create actionable programs to achieve those goals. The creation of these goals also typically undertakes a public engagement process, which, while open to the issues discussed earlier in the paper, can work to educate the public.. Too often, individual local governments act by themselves when trying to address these issues, this fails to recognize the need to collaborate. These individual actors might spur innovation in this area but it doesn't always allow for the scale-ability of successful solutions. This scale-ability will be necessary to apply the best practices across the world to address climate change. Community Development can bring together the built environment, sectors of the local economy, and planning to create climate action for meaningful change. This change can be partnered with state and federal authorities to significantly change government operations in 2030.

Community Development offices are in charge of administering several codes under their purview. Along with administering these codes, they are leading the development of these codes in future updates. It is within that development that communities will be able to plan for more resilient futures. Every office will need to strike the right balance between leading the change and providing the best government service possible. Changes to codes can have significant impacts on the built environment with specialized code sections creating the desired outcome.

Community Development is equipped to do this because they are on the front line of administering the code and understanding what should be done. Proposed changes can follow best practices outlined by ICC or APA but this should still allow for local creativity in addressing problems. Pitkin County's current energy code requires on-site renewable energy to offset energy consumption. This addition also makes these homes more resilient to future weather impacts like fire, floods, or winds. As these methods become more widely accepted, this will allow market innovation to enter the area and promote efficiency.

Development is an important step but the implementation of that code and the routine evaluation of that code is just as critical. Implementation of a new program is only as good as the user acceptance testing during that implementation. Often with code adoptions, the marginalized communities are not at the table or able to provide feedback. Those adopting the code must make sure they are able to gather as much feedback from the public as possible, identify the gaps in their initial project, and work to correct those in future iterations.

Community engagement and involvement is expected throughout a planning process (Eric Damian Kelly, 2013). Within the context of coming to terms with the harm perpetuated by planning, planning is evolving to understand that the best types of plans are those created by and with communities, rather than for them. The role of the planner has adjusted from that of the technocrat to that of the great facilitator, listening to various community stakeholders and analyzing and synthesizing their needs, wants, and ideas to create plans with a greater likelihood of implementation thanks to the increased buy-in created by high levels of community involvement. (Levy, 2016).

Fostering Social Equity

The key question that must be asked of all this though is who sits at the table? As professionals learn to work with rather than for communities, how can equity be brought to the forefront? The NAPA Grand Challenge of Foster Social Equity challenges professionals to:

“Develop a broader understanding of the elements and implications of social equity. For example, social equity includes not just equitable access to programs and services but the unhindered ability to engage in the political process. It also means equitable educational and economic opportunities. Ultimately, it is important to use a social equity lens to examine nearly all policies and practices, and there are major social equity dimensions of each of the other Grand Challenges in Public Administration that should be addressed moving forward.”

Efforts within the realm of planning to use an equity lens are ongoing. In 2019, the American Planning Association (APA) released its first Planning for Equity Policy Guide (American Planning Association, 2019). This guide establishes that

“The planning profession must be deliberate and send clearer signals that social equity is central to encouraging a comprehensive solution. If planners’ toolboxes can be used to exclude, limit, and segregate, then those same tools and regulatory frameworks can be used to implement policies that result in fair, equitable communities.”

It is important here to note the distinction between the APA, which is the professional body representing over 40,000 planners nationwide, and the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) which is a professional accreditation earned through testing and experience requirements and held by approximately 17,000 of those planners. (American Planning Association, 2022). While all AICP planners are APA members, not all APA members are AICP planners.

The APA has adopted “Ethical Principles in Planning” that acts as a “guide to ethical conduct for all who participate in the process of planning.” (American Planning Association, 1992). For AICP planners, the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2021) includes explicit and enforceable rules of conduct.

In 2021 during a time of social reckoning catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd (BBC, 2021), the AICP Code of Ethics was revised to place a more significant focus on the requirement to center equity in plan making. New ethical standards include:

“Examine our own cultures, practices, values, and professional positions in an effort to reveal and understand our conscious and unconscious biases and privileges as an essential first step so we can better serve a truly inclusive public interest promoting sense of belonging.

(...)

Facilitate the exchange of ideas and ensure that people have the opportunity for meaningful, timely, and informed participation in the development of plans and programs that may affect them. Participation should be broad enough to include those who lack formal organization or influence, especially underrepresented communities and marginalized people. Attention and resources should be given to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and should reflect the diversity of the community” (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2021)

Additionally, AICP certified planners are required to undergo 32 hours of “Certification Maintenance” within a two-year reporting period in order to keep their certification. Previously, these credits were required to include at least one hour each of Law and Ethics education. As part of the 2021 revision, this was expanded to include required credits in Sustainability and Equity. (Silver, 2021).

So how does this make better plans? This is perhaps best illustrated through an example. The Illinois chapter of the APA presents an annual awards program. In 2022 the Daniel Burnham Award for a

Comprehensive Plan was awarded to West Chicago Forward/Adelante. (APA Illinois, 2022). The consulting firm who worked on the plan, Muse Planning & Design, took an intentional approach to bilingual and bicultural engagement that goes “beyond land use and address(es) social and economic capital).

Professional organizations are helping planners to center equity in their plan making through the provision of equity resources such as the Planners Toolbox provided by the APA Illinois (APA Illinois, 2021). Planners must be prepared to work with communities that have been historically shut out of the planning process as we move toward 2030 and beyond. Planners must be prepared to meet people where they are, develop new ways of facilitating the public process, and challenge their own unconscious biases.

As a profession, we must embrace ethical standards and plan making procedures that center equity. By doing so, answering the Grand Challenges becomes easier. We are more likely to Connect Individuals to Meaningful Work if our comprehensive plans understand what meaningful work is to different communities, or if our transport plans understand the transportation needs of different cultures. We are more likely to Build Resilient Communities if those communities have ownership of their hazard mitigation plans (American Planning Association, 2020), or if our understanding of affordable housing is based around an inclusive understanding of housing needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. We are more likely to Steward Natural Resources and Address Climate Change when we do this for all people, rather than simply move problems into areas inhabited by those without political capital.

Conclusion

How to Get There

In 1973, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber used the term “wicked problem” for the first time (Rittel, H.W., & Webber, M.M, 1973). What is a wicked problem? They define it as one with no true solution, only a good solution and a bad one. A problem that is irreversible. One which is unique and a symptom of other problems

What then, are the Grand Challenges if not wicked problems? Huge, complex, interwoven issues that stack, and multiply. Challenges without a singular response, but instead call for prolonged, coordinated efforts. The Delegates to the Local Government 2030 were charged with the breaking down of silos. With a skillset in communication, strategic planning, and consensus building, Community Development must be central to these efforts.

In solving the Grand Challenges, the focus of Community Development professionals should be on the following:

- Be bold! Be confident in the value they bring to their communities, and be unafraid in communicating that value.
- Work to educate and reinvigorate elected and appointed officials who have final say over development matters.
- Provide opportunities to engage and involve the next generation of professionals, as well as community leaders, ensuring it is a generation that is representative of their communities.
- Be proactive, not reactive.
- Creating collaborative rather than adversarial relationships with the public and the development community.
- Adopting and embodying ethical values that center equity in every action and decision.
- Embrace new technologies to improve systems and processes for all. Shun a “the way we’ve always done it” mindset.

We proudly offer our vision for the future of Local Government in 2030:

Beyond 2030, Community Development will be at the forefront of a reinvigorated local government. Planners and allied professionals will use their skills to build coalitions of stakeholders who are unafraid to talk about the grand challenges facing their communities. Equity, sustainability, and resilience will be at the heart of all plans and decisions made. Talented Local Government professionals will serve elected and appointed leaders that truly represent their communities, and they will work in partnerships built on trust.

Community Development professionals will be community leaders, educating residents on process and outcomes, while being educated in tandem by residents on the issues that matter most in their communities. Utilizing emerging technologies, Community Development professionals will identify trends and plan proactively to best position their governments and residents. Community Development professionals will create plans to achieve a vision of prosperity as defined through participatory process by local stakeholders, within Earth's natural limits and with full-consideration of societal health and well-being, as best understood through the natural, social, and sustainability sciences. These plans will create the space for agility and innovation to address the complex-adaptive challenges of the 21st century in real-time without sacrificing the defined vision of prosperity, sustainability, or societal health and well-being. Community Development professionals will then be scientifically literate, socially aware and connected with their communities, empathetic, ethical, and with a full understanding and embrace of both systems and solutions thinking. These professionals will simultaneously plan for the future and work to understand the mental models and paradigms of past and present generations that have defined historic and current development and that will impact the development of our communities in the future.

Those seen as emerging leaders in the 2020s will have emerged and will be mentoring the new generation of Community Development professionals. Flexibility in working styles and standards will be the norm, and remote work that crosses boundaries will not be uncommon. These professionals will have the opportunity to work across departments, including finance, public works, public safety, and administration. As they help to shape how their community develops, they will facilitate efforts through all these departments, ensuring that local government works in the best interests of all, without interdepartmental rivalry and siloization. Community Development professionals will be committed to facilitating a future that is better for all stakeholders by shifting towards a development mindset and away from a growth mindset, where the term development encompasses growth when better, but does not when harmful, worse, or detrimental.

With a commitment to lifelong learning, recognizing the sins and mistakes of the past, and identifying the needs of the future, the Community Development delegates to Local Government 2030 believe that momentum is on our side, and that by acknowledging and working collaboratively to answer the Grand Challenges, we can create better communities for all.

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