

STRATEGIES

Newsletter of the City Planning and Management Division of the American Planning Association

Summer 2003

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FOCUS

Trends and Issues in the Field

Reflections on Big City Planning

Stuart Meck, FAICP

APA Senior Research Fellow

Planning for big cities is different than planning in small towns and suburban communities because of the strategic role big cities play in a region, agreed three current and former big city planning directors speaking at a Tuesday conference forum in Denver. That distinction, they said, is what big city planning directors should seize upon in attempting to shape public policy.

"Whatever governance issues you have in central cities," said Eloise Hirsch, former planning director of Pittsburgh, "affect the rest of the region." Because of that, added Paul Farmer, APA's executive director and a former planning director in Minneapolis and Eugene, Oregon, big city planners need to

constantly reassert the importance of the central city to the regional economy.

Another difference, said Maxine Griffith, executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, is that, in big cities, there is typically direct access to the federal government. Planners "have an opportunity to shape federal programs" as they emerge or as they are administered. Philadelphia, Griffith said, retains a lobbyist to provide an early warning system about new federal initiatives, and the city continually interacts with federal officials.

The panelists emphasized that a big city planning department is usually the only local agency with the capacity to monitor
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CONNECTION

Development. Networking. Support

APA Peer Review Adds Value to Critical DC Planning Assessment

*Julie Wagner, Deputy Director, Long Range Planning
DC Office of Planning*

In the spring of 2002, the Mayor and City Council of Washington, DC tasked the Office of Planning to conduct an intensive review of the District's Comprehensive Plan. Because the Comp Plan was originally written in 1984, both the Mayor and Council raised questions as to whether the City should undertake the effort to amend the Comp Plan (which is done every four years) or conduct a major revision of the Comp Plan.

The differences between these two options are significant. Revising the

Comp Plan will mean undertaking new analysis to understand issues and trends facing the District, refocusing the plan to better address these issues, re-writing significant portions of the Comp Plan, and revising its organization and format. Although many policies from the existing Plan would be carried forward, the revised Plan would look very different than the one in place today. Amending the Comp Plan, by contrast, will produce incremental changes that affect smaller elements of the document but not affect the plan's overall direction, organization, and format.



The Office of Planning turned to many sources to help answer this and other questions: a 29-member Task Force appointed by the Mayor and Council; other key community, business, institutional and special-interest leaders; a consultant team known for its comprehensive planning expertise; District leaders and agency representatives; and 'best practices' research on comp plans across the country.

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Managing Planning in Times of Scarcity

Marya Morris, AICP
APA Senior Research Associate

Facing a 15 percent budget reduction for his department in fiscal year 2002, Minneapolis planning director Chuck Ballantine says he had no choice but to go “back to basics.” In a Tuesday session, Ballantine explained that this meant reorganizing the department into two sections: community development, comprehensive planning and research in one area, and zoning and historic preservation in the other.

In the ensuing months after the budget cuts, Ballantine has embarked on a four-point strategy — involving teaching, leading, team building, and exploring — all of which is aimed at informing staff and city leadership about the work of the department, the current limitations, and future challenges.

Staff has taken every opportunity it has had to teach the new city council and mayor about the value of planning. They have made focused presentations on big picture issues confronting the city — such as regional demographic, housing, and transportation forecasts that were released by the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities. This has helped inform leadership of the issues the planning

department will likely be required to respond to in the coming months and years. Ballantine is also exploring new sources of revenue, such as reexamining fee structures.

Ballantine has also kept an open door policy with his staff, and has not hesitated to keep them informed about possible layoffs. “Staff and policy makers both need to have realistic expectations about what the department can be expected to accomplish during lean times,” he says.

Los Angeles planning director Con Howe says tough fiscal times are tough for planners because “we don’t like to say No. We’re an idealistic profession, unlike budget analysts, who seem to have fewer qualms about saying No. But we have to be realistic: planning will always be shortchanged as compared to hard services, like police and fire.”

In L.A., notes Howe, the fiscal crisis is in the public sector; real estate development and thus demand for zoning permits has not tapered off. In fact the city experienced a 24 percent increase in zoning permit requests last

year, all of which had to be managed with fewer staff people and less money. This is a real strain, considering the department is staff to eight commissions, 12 design review commissions, 16 historic preservation boards, 71 neighborhood councils, all requiring staff to attend more than 1,000 public hearings each year.

“With such a built-in work load, it has been important for us to make the case that very little in our department’s work program is flexible,” Howe says. Despite the citywide hiring freeze, he has convinced the human resources department to allow him to fill some positions that needed to be filled and to leave vacant other positions that can wait for the economic upturn.

Like Ballantine, Howe says he has learned to “share the pain” with his staff. “Hiding the realities of cutbacks until the last minute doesn’t do anyone a favor.”

Editor’s note: This article is based upon an educational session sponsored by the City Planning and Management Division at APA’s 2003 National Planning Conference.

NEWS

What’s Happening

Salt Lake City, UT

In an awards ceremony on April 22, 2003, Christie Todd Whitman, director of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), presented Mayor Rocky Anderson with the **Climate Protection Award**, recognizing Salt Lake City’s unprecedented efforts to slow global warming. Salt Lake City is the only municipality being recognized for its efforts, on a local level, to set an example for other cities, taking concrete steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as health-endangering air pollutants. Visit: <http://www.ci.slc.ut.us/mayor/>

San Diego, CA

In October 2002, the San Diego City Council adopted the Strategic Framework Element and Five-Year Action Plan as part of the City’s General Plan update. This decision marks a major change in how the City will address future growth. The Strategic Framework Element contains a strategy called the **City of Villages**, which shifts future growth from once-abundant open land to reinvesting in existing communities. The Planning Department has developed an aggressive work program to implement the Five-Year Action Plan. More information is available online at: www.sandiego.gov/cityofvillages or call the Planning Department at (619) 235-5200.

Phoenix, AZ

Phoenix, Arizona has over 29,000 acres of existing mountain preserve and desert parks and has embarked on an aggressive program to acquire an additional 20,000 acres for the Sonoran Desert Preserve. With such a large desert preserve system in a rapidly developing metropolitan area, it is important that new development be subject to specific criteria when located adjacent to a preserve boundary. The Phoenix Planning, Parks and Recreation, and Development Services departments are preparing **Sonoran Desert Preserve edge treatment guidelines** that will be submitted to city council for adoption in June.

Division Chair's Message

*Fernando Costa, AICP
Planning Director
City of Fort Worth*



APA's 2003 National Planning Conference was a big success. Attendance was excellent, as were the educational and networking opportunities, the setting in downtown Denver, and even the unpredictable spring weather. I'm pleased to report that our City Planning and Management Division was involved in a variety of conference activities.

Educational Sessions: Our division sponsored three sessions relating to the management of planning agencies in large American cities. The first session, "Private Planning in the Public Interest," examined the roles of four private planning organizations — Central Atlanta Progress, The Dallas Plan, Chicago's Metropolitan Planning Council, and New York's Regional Plan Association — and explored opportunities for public/private collaboration. A second session, "Managing Planning in Times of Scarcity," featured current and former planning directors from Minneapolis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles on this important and timely topic. Finally, another panel of big city planning directors engaged in a lively discussion

of long-term trends and issues in "Reflections on Big City Planning." All three sessions were thought-provoking and served to elevate our division's profile within APA.

Planning Directors Breakfast: This annual gathering allowed planning directors from big cities and other jurisdictions to interact informally. Chicago's planning director, Alicia Berg, provided us with an update on our 2002 conference host city and Washington's Andy Altman gave us a preview of the 2004 conference. Mark your calendars now for April 24-28, 2004.

City Planning and Management Division Business Meeting: About twenty division members participated in our annual business meeting. Our outgoing chair, Eloise Hirsh, reviewed the division's recent activities, including the publication of our newsletter and the establishment of our website. Eloise also provided a brief year-end financial report, citing a bank account balance of approximately \$44,000, and passed the gavel to me. Participants then discussed and subsequently ratified our 2003-04 work program and budget, which emphasize five major goals: disseminating useful information about planning activities in large American cities, presenting opportunities for education and professional

development, providing management advice to planning agencies, facilitating informal interaction among planning directors, and continuing to administer the division's business in an open and efficient manner. Much of the discussion revolved around our proposed advisory services program, to be led by Hunter Morrison of Youngstown State University. We then elected Andy Altman as our vice chair and Eloise Hirsh as our secretary-treasurer for the next year. Finally, we approved two bylaw amendments to reflect our practice of electing officers at the annual business meeting and to define a quorum as one percent of the division's membership.

Divisions Council Business Meeting: Eloise Hirsh and I represented the City Planning and Management Division at the semiannual business meeting of the Divisions Council, which represents all 18 of APA's special-interest divisions. Among other actions, the Divisions Council approved a set of criteria by which APA might assess the performance of each division.

Our executive committee looks forward to serving you during the next twelve months. Please feel free to contact me at fernando.costa@fortworthgov.org or 817-871-8042 with your comments and suggestions.

What's Happening, *continued from page 2*

Baltimore, MD

This year, the Baltimore City Department of Planning began a new **Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan** program with the selection of six neighborhood clusters from a pool of fifteen applications. The SNAP program focuses community assets and leadership on establishing a vision for the study area (10,000 to 30,000 population) and an action plan that effectively uses existing resources and assets. Area benefits include tech-

nical assistance in the planning and setting of priorities, access to City departments, adoption by the Planning Commission, follow-through using the City-Stat program, and near-term progress toward longer-term goals. Visit: <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/neighborhoods/snap/index.html>

Oklahoma City, OK

After a two-year collaborative process, the Downtown Oklahoma City Stake-

holders and the City Planning Commission adopted a **Downtown Oklahoma City Strategic Plan**. The plan sets out a vision, strategies, implementation tasks, and organizational structure for continued redevelopment of the downtown, designed to leverage \$400 million in recently completed public projects, including a new central library, ball park, arena, convention center, transit system, canal, and river-lakes. Visit: <http://www.okc.gov/Planning/downtown/>

DIVISION BUSINESS

2003-2004 Work Program and Budget For APA's City Planning and Management Division

As Ratified at the Division's Annual Business Meeting, April 1, 2003

- I. **Mission:** Our division's purpose, according to Section 1.2 of the bylaws, is to "advance the practice of city planning and management in the large-city setting." Three elements of this mission statement effectively define our division's niche within APA: a focus upon planning agency management, an orientation toward big cities, and an emphasis upon the practical over the theoretical. Consistent with those aims, our division has traditionally drawn most of its strength from the involvement of planning directors representing the country's 100 largest cities.

While our division's mission is reasonably distinct and clear, we do not appear to have marketed that mission successfully to most of the planning directors and other planning managers in the nation's big cities, to most of our own division members, or to most APA members in general. Despite their longstanding leadership of our division, planning managers from large municipalities represent only a small fraction of our division's approximately 900 members. Our division certainly should welcome a large and diverse membership, but that membership should include more of those planning managers toward whom the division orients its services.

- II. **Vision:** By 2005, most of the planning directors in the country's 100 largest cities will recognize APA's City Planning and Management Division as a valuable resource in the management of their local planning activities. More than half of those planning directors will be division members, and more than three-fourths of our division members will rate the division's services as generally good or excellent.

III. **Goals and Major Initiatives**

- A. Disseminate **useful information** about planning activities in large American cities.
1. Maintain a **website** for the division in accordance with the APA division website guidelines.
 2. Publish a quarterly **newsletter** in May, August, November, and February.
 - a. Each issue should contain several regular features, including the following:
 - (1) Articles about trends and issues affecting the management of planning departments in large American cities.
 - (2) "What's Happening": A collection of one-paragraph reports on major planning activities in cities across the country.
 - (3) "People": News about planning director appointments, transitions, and awards.
 - (4) A report from the chair about division business.
 - b. Post each issue on the division's website and send it electronically to all division members, planning directors in the 100 largest cities, APA board members, AICP commission members, division chairs, and chapter presidents.
 - c. Mail hard copies of each issue in order to increase the division's visibility.
 - d. Dana Burghdoff, Assistant Planning Director for the City of Fort Worth, has agreed to serve as our newsletter editor.
 3. By September 2003, publish a **directory** of planning directors in the 100 largest cities.
 - a. Post this information on the division's website and send it electronically to all division members and planning directors in the 100 largest cities.
 - b. APA staff has agreed to prepare the directory.
 4. By March 2004, publish an annual **survey** of planning activities, budgets, and personnel in the 100 largest cities.
 - a. Post this information on the division's website and send it electronically to all division members and planning directors in the 100 largest cities.
 - b. Hunter Morrison, Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Youngstown State University, has agreed to conduct this survey with assistance from APA staff.
- B. Present opportunities for **education and professional development**.
1. Sponsor two **educational sessions** at the annual APA conference.
 - a. Topics should relate to the management of planning departments in large American cities. Recent topics have included managing with scarcity, working with private planning organizations, assessing trends in big-city planning, dealing with politics, using expert panels, becoming a planning director, and setting planning department priorities.
 - b. The division's vice chair, Andy Altman, has agreed to organize these educational sessions.

Work Program and Budget continued

2. Support the **Planning Directors Institute**, a seminar for big city planning directors to be conducted on October 1-3 by the Harvard Design School and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Provide division members with a summary of the seminar's proceedings and with the results of any APA-sponsored research to be conducted by the Lincoln Institute.

C. Provide **management advice** to planning agencies.

1. By September 2003, establish an **"e-communities" network** whereby division members might request advice from each other on issues relating to the management of planning agencies.
2. By March 2004, conduct two **peer reviews**.
 - a. In each peer review, three experienced planning directors would visit a host city for three days and provide the local planning director with pro bono advice about the management of his or her planning department.
 - b. Peer reviews might be most beneficial for cities that have recently appointed a new planning director, are experiencing significant opportunities or threats, or otherwise have reason to consider redirecting their planning activities.
 - c. The site visits would be similar in format to those sponsored by the Planning Accreditation Board, the American Institute of Architects, and the Urban Land Institute.
 - d. The products of each peer review would be oral and written reports to the host city's planning director.
 - e. The division would provide a grant to each host city in an amount not to exceed \$2,500 or 50 percent of all travel and report-preparation expenses, whichever is less.
 - f. Hunter Morrison, former planning director for the City of Cleveland, has agreed to lead this initiative by chairing an Advisory Services Committee that would select the host cities and assemble the peer review teams.

D. Facilitate **informal interaction** among planning directors.

1. Host a **networking breakfast** at the annual APA conference. The division's chair should send written invitations to planning directors in the 100 largest cities.
2. Provide a **hospitality suite** for planning directors at the APA conference. The division's vice chair, Andy Altman, has agreed to schedule a series of roundtable discussions to be conducted in this room.

E. Continue to administer the **division's business** in an open and efficient manner.

1. Conduct an annual **business meeting** at the APA conference.
2. Convene the **executive committee**, which consists of the three officers, at the APA conference in the spring.
3. Participate in semiannual meetings of the APA **Divisions Council**.
 - a. Spring meeting on March 29 at the APA conference in Denver.
 - b. Fall meeting on September 12-13 in Chicago.

IV. Budget

A. Checking account balance as of March 29, 2003 = \$44,367.

B. Revenues

1. Dues rebates: \$2,200/quarter x 4 quarters	\$ 8,800
2. Withdrawal from checking account	<u>4,800</u>
Total	\$13,600

C. Expenditures

1. Newsletter printing and mailing: 4 issues @ \$1,500	\$ 6,000
2. Peer reviews: 2 @ \$2,500	5,000
3. Food for annual business meeting	800
4. Travel to fall meeting of Divisions Council	800
5. Contingency	<u>1,000</u>
Total	\$13,600



Reflections on Big City Planning, *continued from page 1*

and interpret social, economic, and spatial trends. It can be highly effective, said Farmer, when it aids elected officials in relating “what’s going on in society” to contemporary local planning policies to ensure a good fit.

Farmer observed that global economies can change very quickly, pointing to rapid shifts in employment from the Silicon Valley in California to India and Asian counties. This can cause dramatic and sudden impacts on big cities and regions. He also pointed to the resurgence of parts of many big cities due to baby boomers who are moving back from the suburbs. Some cities like Chicago have been successful in anticipating this trend, and are now reaping the reward in terms of new residential and commercial construction. Others have been less prescient, he said.

Often, citizen groups in big cities approach planning issues negatively, said Hirsch, and handling them requires great tact and diplomacy. “I find our population [in Pittsburgh] to be pretty irritable people who find it difficult to think expansively,” she reflected. Planners can be most helpful to their elected officials if they can cut through the static of public debate and “be able to articulate a genuine, positive image” of the city’s future.

Farmer said he had visited 33 states since joining APA and he had found that, regardless of region, “water is becoming

an important and visible issue” for big cities. Hirsch said that, in her city, the availability of large expanses of vacant land was an issue. While it could be viewed as a problem and a sign of disinvestment, she instead saw it an opportunity. “How do we capitalize on vacant land in the middle of formerly dense cities?” she asked. Griffith said, in Philadelphia, a big issue was “the care and feeding of the car. Parking, parking, parking — there never can be enough of it.”

All three stressed the need for big city planning directors to be straight shooters and stand their ground as to their professional views.

“Don’t pander to your mayor,” advised Griffith. “We bring great strengths to the table, but they are not great strengths if we don’t use them.” Griffith also cautioned that “you have to know when your ethics and honor will cause you to speak up,” even when the prospect of speaking up might cause you to lose your job.

Farmer underscored the need for big city planners to reach out to other civic, neighborhood, and development groups and to other city departments to gain allies. Success will come, he said, quoting APA Past President Bruce McClendon, if planners “coordinate, integrate, and unify.”

Editor’s note: This article is based upon an educational session sponsored by the City Planning and Management Division at APA’s 2003 National Planning Conference.

...a big city planning department is usually the only local agency with the capacity to monitor and interpret social, economic, and spatial trends.

NEWS

People



S. Gail Goldberg, AICP, San Diego Planning Director, has been awarded the First Place, Distinguished Leadership/Professional Planner Award by the California Chapter of APA.

Charles Graves has been appointed Commissioner of Planning and Community Development for the City of Atlanta. He was previously Director of Planning and Development for the City of Baltimore. Charles is a past chair of APA’s City Planning and Management Division.

Maxine Griffith, AICP, Executive Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, has been elected Vice Chair of the Planning Accreditation Board. Under her leadership, Philadelphia’s Community Heritage Preservation Project recently won APA’s 2003 award for the year’s outstanding planning project.

Chris Ronayne has been appointed Director of the Cleveland City Planning Commission.

Diane Sugimura has been appointed Director of Seattle’s Department of Design, Construction, and Land Use.

Louis Zunguze has been appointed Planning Director for Salt Lake City. He was previously Planning Director for Cherokee County, Georgia.

NEWS

Job Opening: Planning Director, City of Seattle, Salary Range: \$90,556 - \$135,824 DOE

This executive position reports to the Director of the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use. The planning director will shape and organize the planning functions recently assembled in the Department of Design, Const. & Land Use (DCLU), into an integrated, effective core planning function. The functional areas include: long range/

comprehensive planning, land use policy and code development, physical and sub-area planning, and urban design. The director will also provide guidance and oversight to the Design Commission and the independent Planning Commission. Requires a bachelor’s degree in urban planning, architecture, land use planning or related field and a

minimum of five years of progressively responsible experience in the management of complex urban planning issues. Send a cover letter and resume to S. Bonathan, by 6/20/2003 to City of Seattle Personnel, Suite 1220, Dexter Horton Building, Seattle, WA 98104-1793; email to Talent.bank@seattle.gov as MS Word document.

CONNECTION

Development. Networking. Support

Sign Up Now!

Practicing the Art of Politics and City Planning

June 23 - 24, 2003, 9 AM - 5 PM

Harvard Design School, Cambridge, MA

Tuition \$630.00; AIA/CES units: 16

DESCRIPTION

What does it take to become a big city-planning director? This seminar is intended for those interested in meeting the challenges of running a large planning agency. It exposes participants to the mind set of successful direction and discusses topics rarely taught in planning school.

Participants learn how present and former directors have developed practical management techniques to deal with the diverse constituencies and changing needs of contemporary urban communities. This seminar assumes that the participants are at least mid-level professional planners conversant in the basic tools of municipal planning: land use and zoning, subdivision regulation, capital improvement planning and budgeting, design review, policy planning, and statistical analysis.

It focuses on the skills needed to make the leap from the purely professional role of the staff planner to the more complex and nuanced role of the head of a municipal planning agency, metropolitan planning organization, or similarly high-profile planning office. Topics to be covered include managing the expectations of elected officials, the press, the developers, and community constituencies; developing practical tools to manage staff and keep them focused; presenting complex ideas simply and clearly; competing for resources with line departments that deliver direct services; managing relationships with competing planning and developing agencies; and justifying the continued existence of a planning department in times of scarcity by showing measurable progress at budget hearings, community meetings, and election times.

INSTRUCTORS

Eloise Hirsh served as planning director for the city of Pittsburgh from 1994 to 2000. During her tenure, she was responsible for setting the framework for planning and managing the city's physical development, preparing its first Downtown Plan, updating its zoning code, preparing plans for the city's river front and its neighborhoods, and managing the its Block Grant program. She currently serves as director of the Mayor's Commission on Public Education and holds adjunct faculty positions at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh.

David Hirzel, a planner with more than 30 years of professional experience, is a principal at Sasaki Associates Inc., Watertown, MA, a multi-disciplinary design firm with 50 years of master planning experience throughout the world.

Hunter Morrison served as planning director for the city of Cleveland from 1980 to 2002. During his tenure, he oversaw the city's revitalization efforts and preparations of a new city plan, Civic Vision 200, which received the American Planning Association's 1992 National Planning Award for Comprehensive Planning. He was responsible for the city's planning, zoning, design review, and historic preservation and served as president of the region's metropolitan planning organization. Morrison currently holds the position of director of the Center for Urban Design at Kent State University, Kent, OH, where he teaches urban design in practice.

Homer Russell is former director of urban design at the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

Please visit the executive education web site for registration information:

www.gsd.harvard.edu/execed



Regional Newsletter Contributors

The following division members have graciously accepted the task of collecting newsletter articles and updates for cities in their U.S. census regions. Be sure to keep them in the loop on any planning news in your city.

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APA Peer Review Adds Value to Critical DC Planning Assessment

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On reflection, however, one of the most conducive strategies for informing DC on what questions to ask and which strategies to consider was a peer review led by the American Planning Association. The panel included Paul Farmer, Executive Director of APA (who was planning director in several cities across the country), Robert Collins, the City Manager from Kansas City (who at one time was the Planning Director and led their office in developing an award-winning Comp Plan), and Ellen Ittelson, Director of Planning Services from Denver. Members of the peer review panel were selected after the 'best practices' research highlighted Minneapolis, Kansas City and Denver as having insightful and compelling comprehensive plans.

Early in the assessment process, the peer review panel participated in an all-day event, beginning with focused conversations with DC Council

members and the Office of Planning. At these meetings the panel highlighted their experiences in updating their comprehensive plans. They provided an honest and professional assessment of the DC Comp Plan, including several weaknesses that affect its overall usefulness. The panel was also particularly adept in delicately advising the Council that adequate time, resources and political collaboration are critical factors in successfully strengthening a Comp Plan.

In the evening, the 29-member Comprehensive Plan Process Task Force met to hear about comp plans from other cities. The Office of Planning at first had some trepidation in hosting the panel, as many members of the Task Force (which included neighborhood, business and institutional representatives) were clearly skeptical of the assessment process. Their extensive professional experiences in

multiple cities combined with having no personal stake in the DC effort, however, gave the panel the freedom and credibility to provide an honest critique of DC's Comp Plan. Not only did many on the Task Force embrace the overall critique, the energy and enthusiasm for creating a stronger and more influential plan became visibly evident by the end of the night.

The panel's effect on the process did not end that evening. Throughout the rest of the assessment, Task Force members continued to surface insights from the panel, such as linking the CIP to the Comp Plan, creating a clear vision, and having the Comp Plan "tell a story". These ideas were eventually translated into recommendations that both the Mayor and Council approved once the assessment was complete.

STRATEGIES

Published quarterly by the American Planning Association's City Planning and Management Division

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