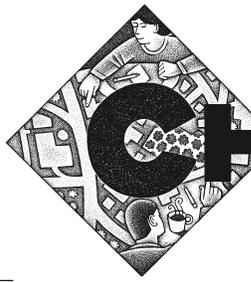


Editor's note: Eight of our regular contributors agreed to share their thoughts on some of the challenges and opportunities planning commissions and their communities will be facing in the years ahead.



CHALLENGES AND

Autos & Aging

by Hannah Twaddell

For the better part of the past hundred years, virtually all new development has been designed with an unspoken assumption: that everyone would always be able to drive his or her own car everywhere. If we want our communities to succeed in the 21st century, we must drop that assumption.

There are many reasons to start transforming car-oriented spaces into people-oriented places. But the problem that will hit home hardest, and soonest, is the staggering rise in the number of older adults who won't be able to drive. According to the U.S. Census, about 12 percent of all Americans are now over the age of 64; by 2050, this proportion will more than double. Within this group, the number of those over age 84 will skyrocket from four to 21 million.

Older Americans are among the nation's safest drivers. But sooner or later, the effects of aging take their toll on even the healthiest person's ability to handle two-ton machines in 70-mph traffic.

Millions will have to stop driving while they still have many years to live. In communities that haven't foreseen their needs, this fast growing segment of the population and their adult children will demand to know why there's no reliable local public transit service; why they can't find sidewalks connecting to nearby shops and markets; and why

there isn't affordable, barrier-free housing in town centers.

Hannah Twaddell is Principal of Twaddell Associates in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Flexibility Is a Virtue

by Carolyn Braun, AICP

It's important that we try to identify and consider the unintended consequences of development. Picture how a use or development will look and function years into the future. Have you anticipated or adjusted your plan for changing demographics and other trends, such as telecommuting or mixed-use development?

For example, in the next decade or so, much time and effort will be spent on providing adequate and affordable senior housing. But what happens when the boomer generation is gone? Will there be a surplus of senior housing? Will it be built in a manner that can be adapted for other users? Or will it sit vacant?

It's also important for plans to be flexible. Where possible, design a plan so that specific elements can be completed as stand-alone projects, or in alternative ways. Moreover, be clear to the community that a long-range plan, by its nature, cannot include all of the detailed requirements that will be identified and adjusted as the plan is being implemented.

Carolyn L. Braun is Planning Director for the City of Anoka, Minnesota.

Credibility Is Essential

by Elaine Cogan

Credibility is the biggest challenge and opportunity citizen planning boards and commissions face, now and tomorrow. By maintaining and enhancing this oftentimes elusive quality, we can meet the future with some degree of confidence.

Citizen planning boards are credible when each decision they make is based on the best, most professional set of facts and findings they can ascertain. If they have biases, they have acknowledged them openly.

Citizen planning boards are credible when they treat each other and their staffs with respect and carry forth that attitude to the public. In the future, as now, we can expect at least as many controversial issues where people with strongly held opinions hold fast to their points of view. However, individuals on planning boards who deal fairly and without rancor are more credible than those who do not.

Credibility must continually be earned and cannot ever be taken for granted. It is a valuable commodity that builds over time and should make planning boards more comfortable making difficult decisions.

Elaine Cogan is Founding Principal, Cogan Owens Cogan, LLC., in Portland, Oregon.

Change & Its Impacts

by Jim Segedy, Ph.D., FAICP, and Lisa Hollingsworth-Segedy, AICP

The biggest challenges facing planners will involve how

we deal with change and its impacts. Among the issues many of us will be addressing:

- right-sizing communities to offer the best quality of life even when the population isn't growing.
- promoting local entrepreneurship and a community character that provides a vibrant place to live and work regardless of its size.

- accommodating Generation Y's strong interest in walkable communities.

- respecting our water resources by discontinuing building in floodplains and by minimizing stormwater runoff.

Among the ways we can meet these challenges:

- reevaluating our plans and land use scenarios to make sure they are based on realistic population and growth projections.

- reviewing our ordinances to ensure they meet the needs of all segments of the community.

- adding more green space – with urban trails, rain gardens, street trees, and in other ways.

- prioritizing infill development over sprawl – by focusing on adaptive reuse of existing buildings; offering incentives for infill; and better controlling infrastructure extensions.

- discontinuing the practice of allowing structures to be built in floodplains or behind levees – by buying out existing floodprone structures; allowing denser development in areas out of harm's way; and using undeveloped floodprone areas for greenway and low-impact recreational uses.

Jim Segedy taught planning for many years at Ball State University, while Lisa Hollingsworth-Segedy is an experienced regional planner.



OPPORTUNITIES

The Place Where We Live

by Edward T. McMahon

If I have learned anything from my career in community planning, it is this: change is inevitable, but the destruction of community character and identity is not. Progress does not demand degraded surroundings.

A sense of place is a unique collection of qualities and characteristics – visual, cultural, social, and environmental – that provide meaning to a location. Sense of place is what makes one city or town different from another, but sense of place is also what makes our physical surroundings worth caring about.

Author Wallace Stegner once said, “If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.” We all need points of reference and orientation. A community’s unique identity provides that orientation, while also adding economic and social value. Our cities and towns must plan for built environments and settlement patterns that are both uplifting and memorable – and that foster a sense of belonging and stewardship by residents.

Planners spend much of their time focusing on numbers – the number of units per acre, the number of cars per hour, the number of floors per building. In the years ahead, they will need to spend more time thinking about the values, customs, characteristics, and quirks that

make a place worth caring about.

What this means is helping communities adapt to change while also maintaining or enhancing the things they value most. Lyman Orton, the founder of the Vermont Country Store, calls this “heart and soul planning.” It is both a process and a philosophy. The process seeks to engage as many people as possible in community decision making. The philosophy recognizes that special places, characteristics, and customs have value.

Edward T. McMahon is a Senior Resident Fellow at the Urban Land Institute.

Redefining Our Future

by Wendy Grey, AICP

While some communities will rebound more quickly from the recession than others, I think most will experience slow growth for at least several years. What will this mean in terms of planning?

Revisiting assumptions about growth: Comprehensive plans in many communities, especially in the “boom states,” call for housing and infrastructure to meet a demand that is no longer realistic. Reevaluate your population projections and their impacts on your plan.

Redefining quality of life: While we all may eventually forget the recession’s tough lessons, it is likely that – at least for the near future – people will continue to be cautious about how they spend their money.

- More people will be producing their own food. Think front

yard vegetable gardens and backyard beehives and chicken coops. Does your zoning code address these uses?

- With less money for vacations, the demand for parks, bike trails, and swimming pools, will likely increase. Are there creative ways these facilities can be developed at a reasonable cost?

Rethinking Home: Ideas about what constitutes a household are changing, as are distinctions between where one lives and where one works.

- Multiple generations of families – as well as groups of unrelated people – are moving in together to cut expenses. This may mean more cars, more traffic, and more demand for parking. Can your regulations better address parking and strategies for pedestrian safety? How do your regulations deal with accessory dwelling units?

- Many are also using their home as the place to start up a new business. Do your home occupation regulations need to be updated?

Our job as planners is not to predict the future, but to understand change, define the kind of future our community wants, and determine how we can help achieve it.

Wendy Grey is Principal of Wendy Grey Land Use Planning LLC in Tallahassee, Florida.

Engaging in Planning

Della G. Rucker, AICP, CEcD

In the years ahead we will be grappling with the impacts of seismically shifting demographics, and major changes in retail and commerce. Our challenge

will be to develop the wisdom to admit what we don’t know – and the intelligence to make the best use of the resources we have.

Dealing with an uncertain world. The future will not be a straight-line continuation of the past. We’ll need to learn to plan in terms of scenarios, examining what we know in light of major factors that may impact our community’s future?

For example: how can we set ourselves up to succeed in the event that we lose major employers, our population explodes from immigration, or the cost of gasoline climbs?

Managing economic data better. Economic issues are central to our quality of life, and unless we specifically address them, our plans will mean little.

This does not mean building our plans around market analyses, which are too limited and short term in nature. What it does mean is gaining a deep understanding of the long-term trends impacting our local economy, and assessing how our community fits into the world around it.

Enabling people to participate meaningfully in planning. Public processes must do more than enable people to yell past each other. If our communities are going to work – and if our planning commissions are going to have the public support to make tough decisions – we’ll need public participation processes that engage our residents in the search for solutions and the hard work of making decisions.

Della Rucker is Principal of Wise Economy Workshop based in Cincinnati, Ohio. ♦