

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

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Connecticut Chapter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings fellow planners! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Emmeline Harrigan and I was recently appointed to fill the role of President due to the resignation of Rebecca Augur, who has taken a role at the Connecticut State Office of Policy and Management. We are grateful for all of Rebecca's efforts over the years, particularly her many years as Editor of *Connecticut Planning* magazine and, as President, her leadership during the challenges of the pandemic and her role spearheading the efforts to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan for our Chapter — among other things. We will miss Rebecca's leadership and look forward to ongoing collaborations with her in her new role at the State.

I just wanted to take a brief moment to introduce myself. I am a Milford, CT native and have been a practicing planner for almost 25 years, with experience in both Southern California and Connecticut. As a CCAPA Board member, I was most recently the co-chair of the Government Relations Committee and I am currently the Assistant Planning Director in Fairfield. As both a Certified Planner and a Certified Floodplain Manager,

I share a passion for not only how we move forward the practice of the planning in our communities to improve the quality of life for our residents, but also how we assist in adopting adaptive planning strategies to ensure Connecticut's long-term resiliency with a rapidly changing environment and climate. These are interesting times as planners in our state and change is on the horizon in many of our built environments. Recently I read an article by writer Addison Del Mastro on the online site VOX where he poses the question, "What if the suburbs were just a first draft?" I feel strongly that planners are the change agents best suited to work with our communities to answer this question. The article brought to mind that drafts are a constant exercise of improvements through an iterative



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On the cover: American Rescue Plan Community Meeting at Wilson Library, Hill Neighborhood, New Haven, August 3, 2021.

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

is published quarterly by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association. Contributions are encouraged. Submissions must include the name and contact information of the contributor. Material may be edited to conform to space or style requirements. Please address submissions to Executive Editor Amanda Kennedy, AICP (contact information below).

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, CONT'D

These are interesting times as planners in our state and change is on the horizon in many of our built environments.

and collaborative process — much like the work we do as planners. We come to a better version by the balance of preserving the best of what we have today, but also adding, editing, and refinement. Together we can and we must do this work and my hope is that CCAPA can continue to be a resource that provides the tools through professional development, highlighting and sharing best practices within this publication, and providing the networking opportunities so that we can support each other as colleagues.

Please feel free to reach out at any time at emmelineharrigan@gmail.com if you'd like to volunteer with one of our CCAPA committees or would like to share ideas about planning in Connecticut. Take care. 🏠

— Emmeline Harrigan, AICP, CFM 

FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to this special issue of *Connecticut Planning*, produced by Guest Editor Michael Piscitelli. One could argue that we are entering a golden age for public engagement, with direct stakeholder communication made possible through project websites, social media, and new options for virtual participation that became normalized during the height of the pandemic. But it takes more than tech to overcome skepticism or hostility to government and governmental processes. For this issue, we commissioned several articles providing pointers to planners seeking to rebuild trust in government and trust in the planning process.

Do you have an idea for a future *Connecticut Planning* issue? Opportunities exist to guest edit or contribute content. Contact me at akennedy@secc.org. 🏠

— Amanda E. Kennedy, AICP 



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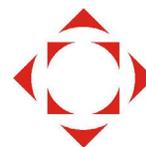
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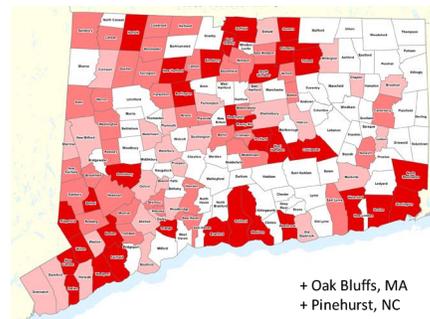
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Pathways to Restoring Trust in Governance

by Michael Piscitelli, AICP, Economic Development Administrator, City of New Haven



¹ Freedom House produces research and reports on a number of core thematic issues related to democracy, political rights, and civil liberties. The full report, [Democracy Under Lockdown, Oct. 2020](#), includes a number of recommendations related to human rights and support for marginalized communities.

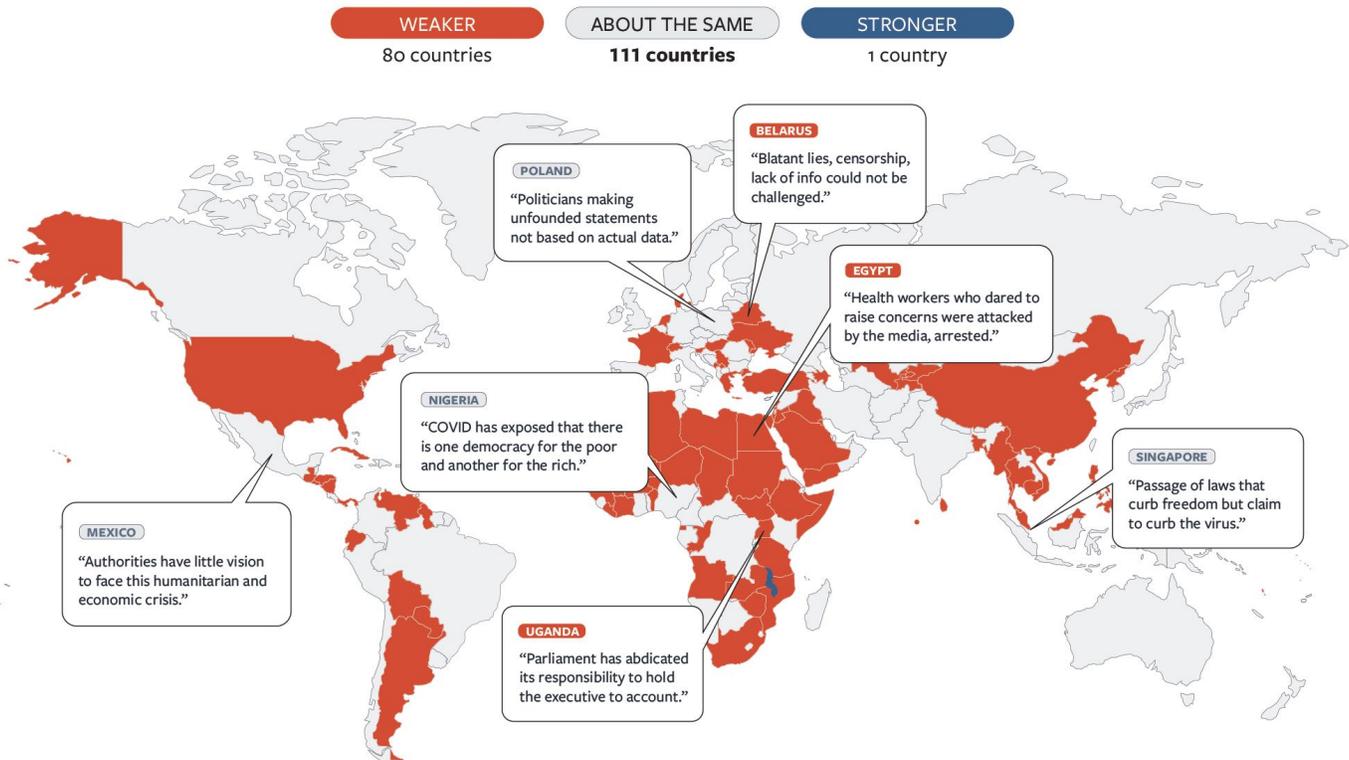
Here at home, and in many countries around the world, there is increasing concern about a mistrust of governance and the cascade of adverse impacts on democratic values. Take for example the work of Freedom House, which monitors issues related to democracy, political rights, and civil liberties. At the height of the pandemic, Freedom House reported that democracy weakened in 80 countries, including the United States, and strengthened in only one (Malawi).¹ As part of their research, governments were measured relative to five pillars of a strong democracy: transparency, free media and expression, credible elections, checks against abuse of power, and protection of vulnerable groups.

Connecticut planners are stepping up as the very trusted professionals which form the cornerstone of any just government, in part by addressing the social and economic turbulence of our times. The frame of reference is often related to the global pandemic and the resulting impacts on community health and wellbeing. Indeed, many planners were educated in graduate school about the long lasting effects of natural disasters, pandemics, war and other devastating events. The COVID-19 playbook has included a range of efforts to support public health and the need to maintain continuity of government. There has been intense focus on “bouncing back” with planners driving grant applications, new programs, and

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GLOBAL DEMOCRACY HAS GROWN WEAKER DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since the coronavirus outbreak began, the condition of democracy and human rights has deteriorated in 80 countries around the world.



Restoring Trust in Governance, cont'd

investments related to the American Rescue Plan Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. These initiatives are moving in tandem with the regular run of special permits, site plan reviews, and the state-wide push to unlock the affordable housing crisis.

As so well articulated in APA's new Code of Ethics, planners are tackling these contemporary challenges through the lens of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. This work weaves together with our responsibility to protect and enhance democratic values and just governance.

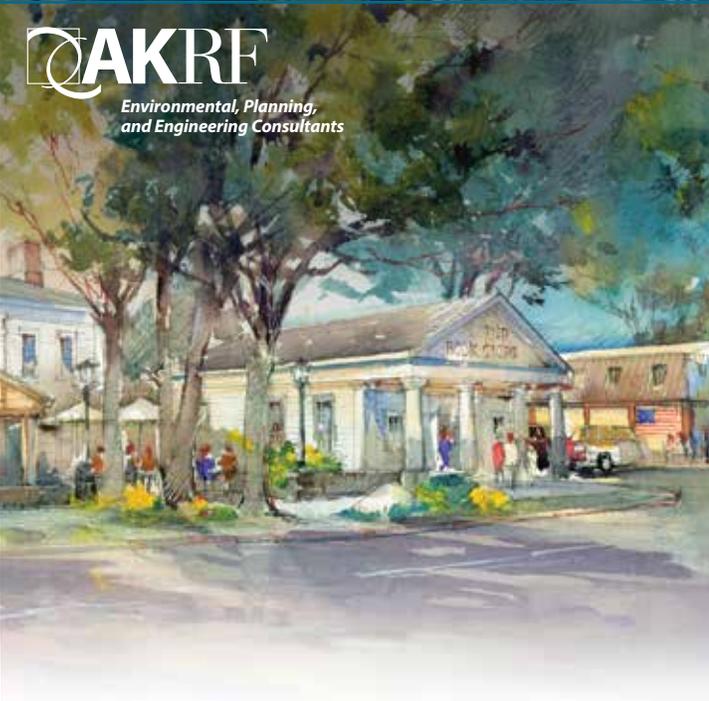
Planners have an important role at this key moment in time. The killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, MN; the insurrection against the United States on January 6, 2021 in Washington DC; and the racially motivated mass shooting on May 14, 2022 in Buffalo, NY all underscore the need to confront hate, systemic racism, and discriminatory practices as a pathway towards justice across society.

Transparency is one of the five pillars and is closely aligned with APA's ethical principle "to achieve high standards of integrity and proficiency so that public respect for the planning process will be maintained." To achieve transparency in the public process, planners often must address a triple-threat scenario: a lack of preparation time for public engagement, the decline in mainstream media communication, and the need to facilitate in a highly contentious public arena. Here are just a handful of thoughts on how we can tackle the triple-threat:

■ **Preparation.** Even with so many competing demands on time, preparation is important and should not be pushed off. In addition to topical details, goal- and tone-setting are the responsibilities of the project lead. A municipal planner should not rely too much on consultants who often are not in position to see the broader context on the ground and will not be around to maintain ongoing relationships through implementation. With each major community meeting in 2020

Do not assume an initiative is broadly understood across the community.

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Over 1,800 local newspapers have closed since 2004. The amount of print space available for planning, economic development, and other initiatives will be increasingly limited in the future. It is therefore important to have accurate and comprehensive materials available for reference.

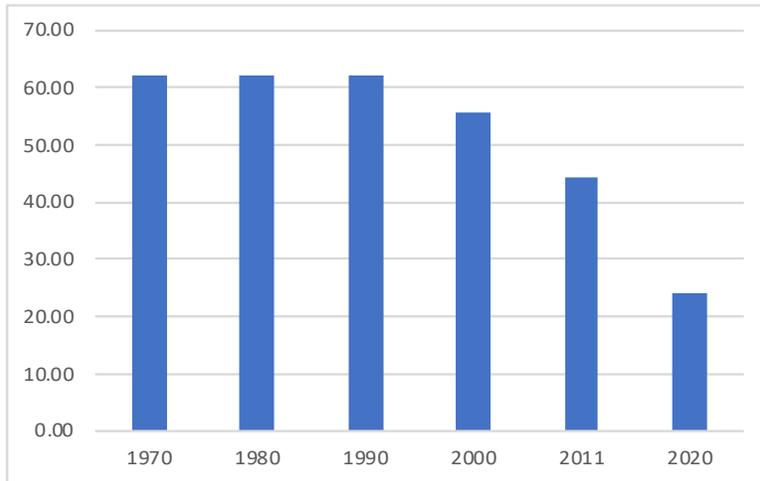
Restoring Trust in Governance, cont'd

and 2021, our New Haven planning and development teams included one or more slides on pandemic response (where to learn more about vaccines, for example) and related initiatives (small business and rental housing relief programs), all designed to provide a more complete context of citywide initiatives before moving into the details of the specific project or topic of the meeting. In this manner,

planners “set the table” with deep empathy for the much more challenging circumstances facing our community.

■ **Communication.** From 2000-2018, weekday newspaper circulation fell nationwide from 55.8 million households to an estimated 28.6 million. Over 1,800 local newspapers have closed since 2004.² The amount of print space available for planning, economic development, and other

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Newspaper Circulation 1970-2020
(in millions)

² For more information on newspaper circulation and employment trends, read the [Pew Research Center's 2021 Fact Sheet](#) and [fivethirtyeight's article Local News Coverage Is Declining — And That Could Be Bad For American Politics](#), June 2, 2021.

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Restoring Trust in Governance, cont'd

initiatives will be increasingly limited in the future. Even with more emphasis on outreach and direct engagement, do not assume an initiative is broadly understood across the community. In fact, it is more likely that echo chambers will emerge for or against the initiative in part due to the emergence of private discussion groups and opinion-based platforms. It is therefore important to have accurate and comprehensive materials available for reference. A section of the website dedicated to the project, a regular email, and a progression of presentation materials and meeting notes all will demonstrate a level of consistent communication over time and serve to weaken the effectiveness of a disinformation campaign.

■ **Facilitation.** Throughout the state and across the nation, public officials work in highly contentious environments. At times, this may arise simply from the nature of the topic, say the potential traffic impacts associated with a new development. At other times, it is fueled by disinformation or outright racism. It is important to know the difference and lead accordingly. Address comments thoughtfully, honestly, and based on evidence. Correct disinformation with facts. Have no tolerance for hate. While this may seem daunting particularly when we have seen violent outbreaks at public meetings, planners are excellent facilitators and we can rely on time-tested strategies like establishing ground rules, setting expectations, and fostering a sense of belonging for all. Creating a safe space for participants in part by welcoming introductions with preferred use of pronouns is just one of the many ways the project lead can set a very clear tone of inclusion.

As underscored in the updated AICP Code of Ethics, process matters. The planner has an important role to safeguard fair decision-making and a rigorous approach leading up to these decisions. In doing so, we are reminded of all five democratic pillars which will lay the groundwork to implement our own contentious initiatives. Here are some excellent resources to support us on the journey:



[APA—Leading Transformative Change \(APA Learn\)](#). The nation’s current civil and social unrest is deeply connected to the racial disparities exposed through COVID-19. In this series, APA brings together leaders in our profession for a presentation on creating equitable places with demonstrated lessons on infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion into planning practices. Mitchell Silver, FAICP moderates the series with speakers Tamika Butler, Jay Pitter, MES & Justin Garret Moore, AICP.

[“Civilitating” Colorado Land Use \(YouTube\)](#). Joy Lujan is the founder of Connected Realities and a former community planner with the National Park Service. In this TEDx talk, she discusses a meaningful public participation process for a river management plan in Durango, CO focused on shared humanity, understanding and deep levels of collaboration.

[Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth \(City of Richmond\)](#). The City of Richmond and its Department of Planning and Development Review were recognized by APA with the Daniel Burnham Award for its focus on reckoning with the past, expansive community engagement, and an equity focus in its new comprehensive plan as the city approaches its 300th anniversary. The plan outlines six “big moves” to guide implementation.

[Government Alliance on Race & Equity \(racialequityalliance.org\)](#). GARE is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. As a membership-driven organization, GARE’s programs and training are made available throughout the organization. ■

As underscored in the updated AICP Code of Ethics, process matters.

— *Michael Piscitelli, AICP, is the Economic Development Administrator for the City of New Haven, where he has served in various roles since 2000. Michael served as the President of CCAPA from 2016 to 2019.*

New Haven Democracy School: A Case Study

by Dijonee Talley, Special Projects Director, City of New Haven Department of Community Resilience

For over 10 years, the Office of the Mayor of the City of New Haven has convened “Democracy School,” a program that offers selected student-residents the opportunity to dive “under the hood” of the machine that is municipal government. This eight-week program is an interactive experience that offers learning and dialogue about city services, programs, and responsibilities of city offices and personnel, including day-to-day operations, challenges to city government, and budget processes. Moreover, Democracy School promotes partnerships between community and government by providing a forum where local government officials and community members can interact and exchange ideas.

The informal, small group approach of Democracy School is what makes the program so unique. The average resident may only interface with local government through public-facing services. For example, residents are more likely to have experience with paying taxes, voting, interacting with the school

system, and other city-run social services. However, there are more people that make local government work than what meets the eye. There are hundreds of municipal employees, all with critical jobs who are constantly navigating processes, making decisions, and overcoming challenges each and every day to keep the city running. Democracy School connects each student-resident directly to a sample of these public servants to learn what their jobs are, what responsibilities each has to the residents of the City, and to ask important questions and dialogue about real issues relevant to these services. As one resident put it, “It’s nice not just to know what is done, but how it’s done.” Residents apply to join the Democracy School, many going on to serve on boards and commissions or even apply to work for the City. In this way, Democracy School is not just an opportunity for residents to learn about city operations, but also as a tool for transparency and engagement in local government more broadly.

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A Small Change in a State Law That Makes a Big Difference

by John Guskowski, AICP, LEED AP, ENV-SP

There is always a mismatch between expectation and results after a biennial short session (February to May) of the Connecticut General Assembly, and this year's session bore that out. Going into a short session, most advocacy groups and committee chairs do their best to set modest goals, identifying just a very short list of priorities. All the same, the crush of the shortened timeframes and the very human tendency to focus 80% of energy on 20% of the issues means that we once again emerged from the legislative session with very few major steps forward. State employees and members of the House and Senate got a long-awaited raise. The CGA led the charge in strengthening abortion protections.

Youth mental health services got a boost. The robust budget surplus found its way into some tax relief. The 2018-2023 State Plan of Conservation & Development was adopted (four years into its five-year scope).

These are all worthy accomplishments and made some very significant investments and philosophical statements. To be fair, the State, both legislative and executive branches, saw significant movement on ARPA-funded economic and infrastructure funding programs. But for the practicing planner looking for continued progress on important housing, economic development, transportation, or zoning legislation, the session was a bit

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While the momentum generated last year around zoning and housing slowed significantly this year, one bill that did pass codifies a major advance for access and public engagement with our government.



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A public agency is broadly authorized to choose to conduct meetings in person, virtually, or in a hybrid manner — with two important caveats.



Small Change, cont'd

underwhelming. The momentum generated last year around zoning and housing slowed significantly this year, as proposals to require increased housing densities in TOD areas and to adopt a “Fair Share” housing standard didn’t make it out of committee.

Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps because it was a seemingly minor piece of legislation, I spent a lot of time focused on a bill that did pass, one which codifies a major advance for access and public engagement with our government. House Bill 5269 (which became [Public Act 22-3](#)) removed the sunset date of April 30, 2022 from a COVID-era bill that allowed public agencies to decide whether to hold meetings in person, virtually, or as a hybrid under the Freedom of Information Act. The removal of this sunset provision means that, from now on, every public agency, including local Boards and Commissions, can choose for themselves how to best conduct the business of government and avail themselves of 21st century

technology in doing so. This is, to paraphrase Joe Biden, a big freakin’ deal, for reasons both big and small.

To briefly clarify the provisions of the Public Act: a public agency is broadly authorized to choose to conduct meetings in person, virtually, or in a hybrid manner, but with two important caveats. First, if a public agency opts to hold an in-person meeting, but any individual member of that agency requests to participate virtually, that member’s virtual participation must be accommodated. Second, a member of the public must be provided with a physical location and necessary electronic equipment to participate if that individual requests these accommodations at least 24 hours ahead of a virtual meeting. Both of those provisions will tend to push many public agencies into a place of hybrid capacity. For many municipalities, this will be a short-term technological challenge and a learning curve, but the long-term benefits are significant.

Despite the challenging adjustment from three-dimensional, in-person

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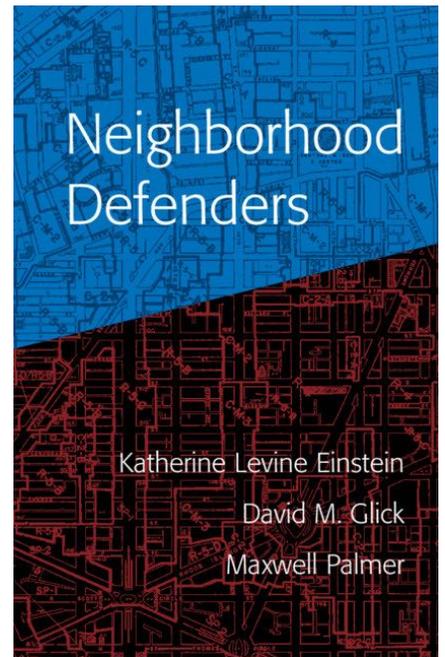
Small Change, cont'd

interactions to the sometimes awkward, flat screens of a Zoom meeting, the COVID-forced experiment with virtual public meetings has been a resounding success. Both formal and informal surveys found broad support for continuing virtual meeting options — the Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) documented over 90% support for these meetings, and straw polls conducted among the Government Relations Committee of CCAPA found near-unanimous enthusiasm for virtual or hybrid meetings. Once you are comfortable with the technology, it is impossible to beat the convenience. Speaking quite narrowly and selfishly, for those of us who staff multiple Boards and Commissions (across several towns), to avoid having to drive hours back and forth to evening meetings is a complete game-changer. The control of screens for application presentations also facilitates a more focused discussion.

More broadly and significantly, the advent of virtual public meetings has made significant improvements in public access to the function of government. While all public agency meetings are broadly “open to the public,” the reality has always been that participation at a local Board of Education or Zoning Commission meeting is not truly open. Because most of these local public meetings take place at a municipal building, at night, there is a

natural exclusion of wide swaths of potentially-interested residents, including working parents, mobility-limited residents, hourly/shift workers, and those without reliable access to personal transportation. It is not surprising at all, as documented in the excellent study, *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*, that the residents who have traditionally participated in local public meetings tended to be older, wealthier, whiter, and more resistant to change than the public at large.

Allowing remote access to public meetings opens the doors of democracy to far more of the community than ever before. Connecticut's fierce attachment to the
(continued on page 12)



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Virtual meetings as an option to participate in our democracy are here to stay.

— *John Guskowski is a Principal and Co-Founder of Tyche Planning & Policy Group, LLC, based in Vernon, CT, and co-chairs CCAPA's Government Relations Committee with Karen Martin.*

Small Change, cont'd

ancient Town Meeting format of government, particularly in small towns, can be properly updated to our contemporary lives and technology. While certainly not every resident of Connecticut has access to a smartphone or computer (and we must do much better with rural broadband access!), the distribution of this technology is far more widespread than the average citizen's capacity to attend an evening town hall meeting. The use of hybrid meetings also means that both options are available to all. This is a real moment of increased equity in access to the function of government. Far from allowing Commissioners to "hide behind their computer screens" in making hard decisions (as some critics of virtual meetings claim), the increased availability of the public to participate increases both awareness and accountability of public decision-makers. This accountability is further bolstered by the increased ability of local media to cover multiple public meetings in any given evening.

Anecdotally, the past two years of virtual public meetings necessitated by COVID have seen a marked increase in public participation. One needs to look no further than the CGA's Planning & Development Committee, who saw multiple public hearings over the past two sessions extend into the wee hours of the morning, with one hearing going a full 24 hours, during which over 300 participants signed up to testify. More locally, many municipal planners across the state have reported significantly higher interest and attendance in public meetings in the last two years than ever before.

In a legislative session that didn't see much significant change in land use or planning policies, this small change really stood out. Virtual meetings as an option to participate in our democracy are here to stay. That's a good thing for democracy. Oh yeah, and it's way easier to reduce the spread of deadly airborne viruses in a crowded and improperly ventilated municipal building, particularly when a home computer or smartphone will work just as well. So that's good too. 🏠

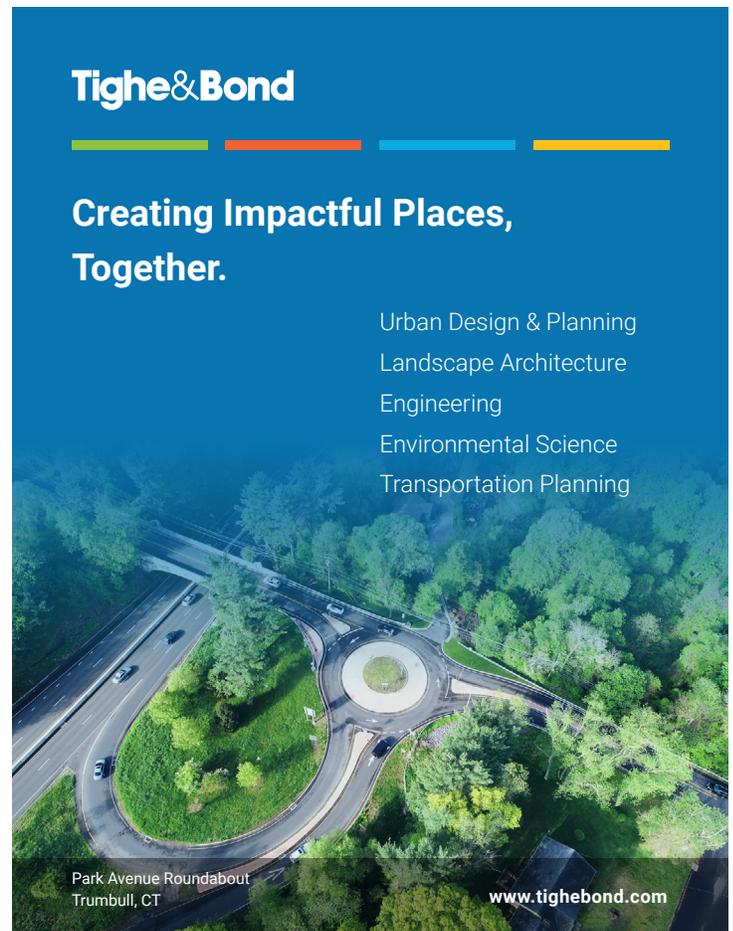


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MEMBER NEWS

- **Ashley Stephens** is the new Town Planner for Vernon as of August 1.
- **Rebecca Augur** began work this summer as the Policy Development Coordinator for the Office of Responsible Growth, Intergovernmental Policy and Planning Division at Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management and has stepped down as CCAPA's President. She was formerly the Director of Planning for the Town of Glastonbury.
- **Kyle Shiel** has joined the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) as Senior Planner. He was formerly Senior Planner for the Town of Manchester.
- **Emily Hultquist** has joined the staff of Northwest Hills Council of Governments as Assistant Director. Emily was formerly with CRCOG, most recently as Director of Policy and Planning.
- **Benjamin Winter** is the new GIS coordinator for the City of Westfield, MA.
- **Alice Dew** is Ridgefield's new Director of Planning and Zoning. Alice formerly served as the Town of Brookfield's land use coordinator.
- **Nicole Haggerty** has joined the staff of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments as Planner II. Nicole returned to Connecticut after receiving her master's from the University of Texas at Austin and working for the City of Round Rock, TX as long range planner.
- **Jasmine Peele** has joined the City Plan Department for the City of New Haven as Planner II. Jasmine is a graduate of the University of Connecticut and formerly served with the City of Norwalk as a Zoning Assistant and with the City of Hartford as a planning intern.



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The recent update to the AICP Code of Ethics calls for planners to change the way that we do business by performing our work in a manner that addresses social justice and focuses on making equitable decisions for the good of all that we serve.

Inclusive Public Engagement — Putting the Code into Practice

by Debbie Alaimo Lawlor, FAICP, PP

By human nature, planners are generally civic-minded individuals that seek to make our communities great places to live and work. However, for decades there have been aspects of our work related to planning and zoning that have not served all of our constituencies equally and in many cases have negatively impacted underrepresented groups, whether intentionally or inadvertently.

While the [AICP Code of Ethics](#) has always aimed to guide and inspire planners to make ethical decisions, it has not specifically drawn attention to historic inequities resulting from our work, nor has it focused on ways that planners may be the change agents to eliminate bias from our recommendations and ultimately the decisions of those that employ us.

The recent update to the AICP Code of Ethics (effective January 1, 2022) calls for planners to change the way that we do business by performing our work in a manner that addresses social justice and focuses on making equitable decisions for the good of all that we serve.

The *Aspirational Goals* of the Code of Ethics (Section A) highlight several areas where planners can better serve the public interest by seeking a greater degree of equity and inclusion, including:

- 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 a sense of belonging.
- Develop skills that enable better communication and more effective, respectful, and compassionate planning efforts with all communities, especially underrepresented communities and marginalized people, so that they may fully participate in planning. Respect the experience, knowledge, and history of all people.
- Incorporate equity principles and strategies as the foundation for preparing plans and implementation programs to achieve more socially just decision-making. Implement, for existing plans, regulations,

(continued on page 15)

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Inclusive Public Engagement, cont'd

policies and procedures, changes which can help overcome historical impediments to racial and social equity.

- 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.

Furthermore, the *Rules of Conduct* (Section B) of the Code of Ethics includes rules that all certified planners shall adhere to. A new rule has been added to specifically address acts of discrimination and harassment that states, "We shall not commit or ignore an act of discrimination or harassment."

The importance of this rule is not only to ensure that planners don't commit a wrongful act of discrimination or harassment, but also to guide planners to elevate any issues of discrimination or harassment that they may perceive in their work in an effort to eliminate them from the decision-making process.

Please take some time to review the [AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#) and learn the context behind many of the important changes.

Inclusiveness in the Public Engagement Process

A key role that planners can play in putting new elements of the AICP Code of Ethics into practice is to broaden the scope and goals for public engagement to include more diverse and inclusive participation throughout the process.

Presenting a project at a meeting is a means of providing public information; it is not public engagement. Accepting public comment on a project is a way for the public to provide their input related to

(continued on page 16)

The Aspirational Goals of the Code of Ethics highlight several areas where planners can better serve the public interest by seeking a greater degree of equity and inclusion

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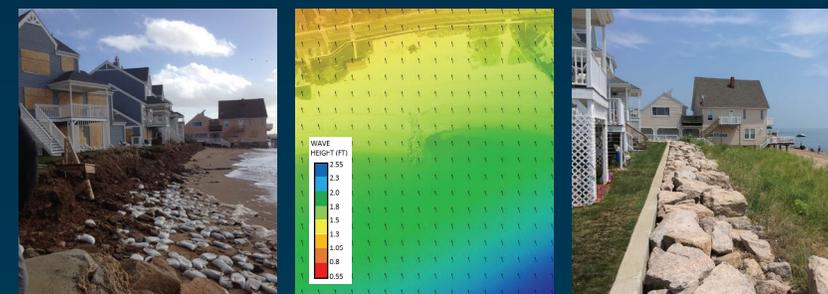
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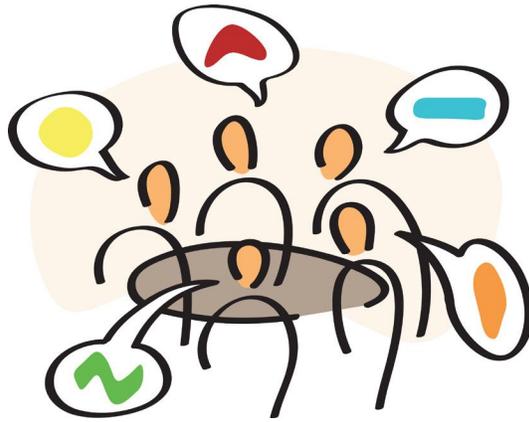
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Public engagement is one of the greatest parts of any democratic process.



Inclusive Public Engagement, cont'd

their views and/or desired modifications with the intention of seeking a better outcome for the community — that is one means of engagement and oftentimes the only type that is used to gain public input. The problem is that while public notice may be provided in accordance with the law, it is not far-reaching enough to be acknowledged as a solicitation for public input and engage the potentially impacted audience. Sometimes, to achieve extensive

public engagement, the planner needs to go above and beyond to reach a large, diverse audience that will provide meaningful input.

Public engagement is one of the greatest parts of any democratic process — it can be focused on a single topic/location (a zoning change or development project) or broader-based (a comprehensive master plan) — but should never be discriminatory or limit participation of those who may be affected by the outcome of recommendations or decisions related to a plan, program, or process. It should be designed to solicit the greatest amount of participation and input from a diversity of constituents that are representative of the affected community.

The best public engagement occurs early on in a process where information gathered from the public can play a meaningful part in the decision-making process. Additionally, a multifaceted public engagement program is more inclusive and helps to achieve broader input. There are a number of methods to gather public input and by combining several of these



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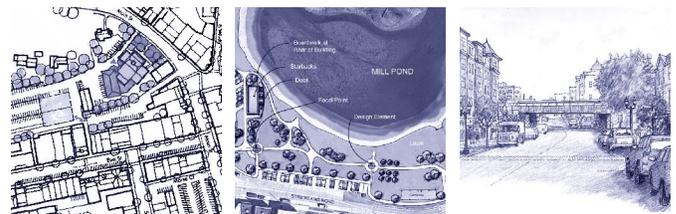
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Inclusive Public Engagement, cont'd

you can reach a range of constituents with diversity of age, race, ethnicity, identity, geographic location, etc. You can reach the public at a meeting location or out in the neighborhood (on their own turf), at a scheduled time or on their own time, and using technology or not. Engagement should seek to attract participants with varying knowledge of the location, project components, historic data and more.

A multifaceted public engagement program may include any of the following:

- Charrettes/Public Workshops
- One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Tactical Urbanism, Pop-Ups, Walking Tours
- Brochures
- Surveys
- ESRI Story Maps

The most important part of facilitating a public engagement process is to keep it simple, understandable, experiential, inclusive, and transparent. The planner has a responsibility to ensure that information presented is understandable and accurate. Provide notice in several places where the general public will see it, not just in a public notice column of a newspaper, but on a municipal calendar of events and postings at public locations like schools, ballfields, coffee shops, and supermarkets. Do not use uncommon jargon or acronyms. Do use visuals — images, graphics, maps. Don't talk at the audience, but rather talk with the audience — you want to hear what they have to say as much as to provide them with sufficient background information. Let the public know that their input and opinions count by informing them how their comments will be incorporated into the process moving forward and provide them with next steps whenever possible.

While there is no guarantee that all viewpoints can be addressed, an inclusive process ensures that all voices are heard and considered as part of the decision-making process. Including the public in the planning process from the start leads to more productive dialogue and better plans. 



Emeline Harigan

— *Debbie Alaïmo Lawlor, FAICP, PP is the Discipline Leader for Planning Services at Colliers Engineering & Design and a former President of the American Institute of Certified Planners and member of the national APA Board of Directors.*

Don't talk at the audience, but rather talk with the audience.



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Planners often find themselves in the eye of the distrust storm, with hardly an umbrella to keep dry.

Planners Need to Strategically Invest in Building Trust

by Eric Gordon, Professor, Assistant Dean, and Director of the Engagement Lab at Emerson College

People working within public institutions are acutely aware that they are operating in a challenging trust environment. Trust in institutions generally is in decline. From 2019 to 2022, the [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) (a survey that measures perceptions of trust in nonprofits, the media, business, and government in 28 countries), has identified a global decrease of trust in institutions and leaders. Edelman associates this decline in trust with the rise of misinformation, racial injustice, and growing inequality worldwide, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Iulia Vann, the public health director of Guilford County, North Carolina, put it this way: “Throughout the pandemic, people’s

trust started eroding, to the point that when the vaccine came, we were at probably historical low levels of trust, and we had to regain it in a very short period of time. So, the work that we’ve done for decades to build the trust of our community has eroded in 12 months or less.”

As a result of this learned and felt reality, cities around the world are rethinking how to build trust with their constituents. As the Smart City Under Secretary for the City of Buenos Aires, Agustín Suárez, explained: “[Governing] is a matter of trust. And it’s a great deal of work to make government trustworthy enough.” Trust-building efforts in cities range in strategy and tactic and come with specific

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Strategically Invest, cont'd

assumptions about how trust works and how to repair it. For some, the distrust is primarily a consequence of inefficient systems and unreliable transactions, including antiquated computer systems and too much room for human discretion in the execution of programs and policies. And for others, the distrust is a misalignment of values, including perceptions of elite politicians, racist institutions, and government offices that just don't care about communities. What cities have in common is a shared mission to *solve for trust*.

Despite the actions of cities, planners often find themselves in the eye of the distrust storm, with hardly an umbrella to keep dry. They are tasked with being on the frontlines, developing tactics to support relationships in communities, while being removed from the city level strategies that reduce or exacerbate distrust. Most planners understand that traditional tactics of town hall meetings, surveys, and drop-in hours, are less than effective for supporting trust relationships, but they don't often understand why.

Institutional trust is a relationship between two actors, the trustor (constituent) and the trustee (institution). The trustor makes a prediction about the future, based on their perceptions of the trustworthiness of the trustee and their past experiences. The goal of the trustor is to reduce the risk associated with the relationship by minimizing possible negative outcomes. Risk is reduced because the trustor has **faith** that the trustee will do as expected (which involves the abstract be-

lief in the benevolence of the institution), or **confidence** that the trustee will deliver reliable transactions (which involves direct experience of the trustor). When planners interact with communities as representatives of institutions, they are strengthening or weakening faith or strengthening or weakening confidence. Because of the frontline position of planners, and their role as interface between communities and the city, confidence may be better left to other agencies. It is imperative that planners focus their attention on the faith-based aspect of building trust right now, as the planning process can heavily inform the abstract identity of the institution as trustee. When given the chance, planners should focus on relationship building, investment in human interactions that include neighborhood liaisons, actually spending time at community meetings, and forming new relationships not tied to specific government initiatives. City-wide efforts to align urban values — like [this project I worked on in Cluj-Napoca, Romania](#) — demonstrate that doing this work in low trust environments requires the creation of deliberative spaces where definitions can be negotiated.

So, let others focus on increased efficiency in government. Planners need to cultivate *meaningful inefficiencies*, or the “deliberate design of less efficient over more efficient means of achieving some ends,” in order to strengthen faith in institutions. In my [2020 book](#) called *Meaningful Inefficiencies*, Gabriel Mugar and I document four activities in which planners should be investing time and money (as shown in the chart below):

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Planners should focus on relationship building, investment in human interactions that include neighborhood liaisons, actually spending time at community meetings, and forming new relationships not tied to specific government initiatives.

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Network Building | Supporting internal and external relationships in communities |
| Holding Space | Creating welcoming and inclusive (digital and physical) spaces for participation and feedback |
| Distributing Ownership | Ensuring that participants are invested in the work and have the will and capacity to meaningfully participate |
| Persistent Input | Ensuring that there are lasting impacts and conversation of the work after the project timeline |

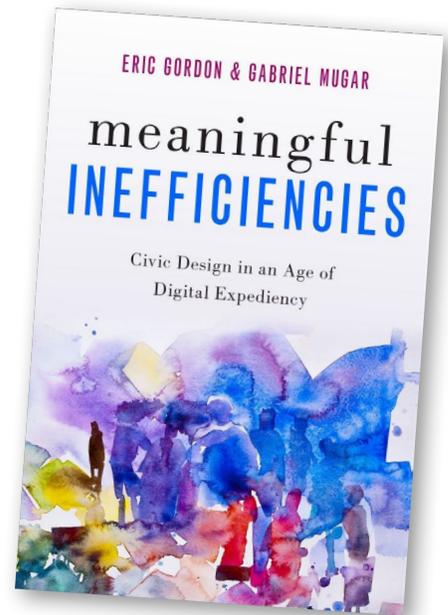
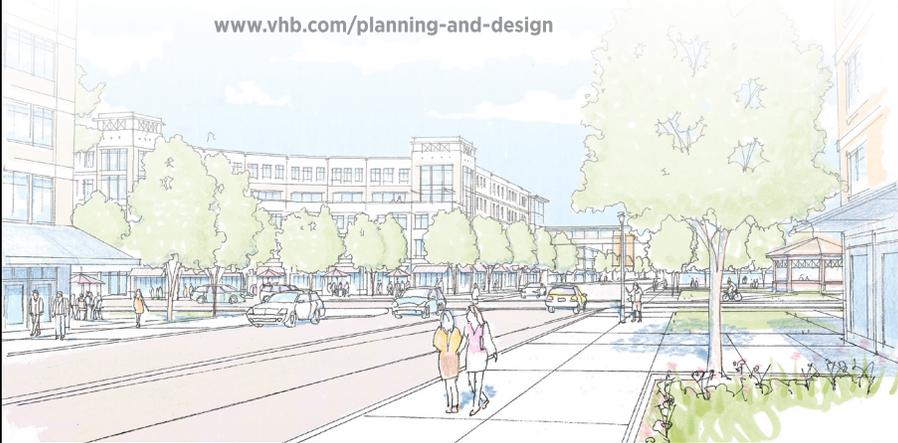


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Strategically Invest, cont'd

Planners should reclaim that consultant money that pays external entities to streamline data collection and put it towards meaningful inefficient processes that can build trust through: allowing trustors (constituents) to have faith in the trustee's (government) benevolence, and allowing trustors to see the trustee's values as more closely aligned than previously expected. Cities are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy brought about by lagging trust. Planners are in position to actually do something about it. ■

— *Eric Gordon is a professor of civic media and the director of the Engagement Lab at Emerson College in Boston. His research focuses on the transformation of public life and governance in digital culture, and the incorporation of play into collaborative design processes. He has served as an expert advisor for local and national governments, as well as NGOs around the world, designing responsive processes that encourage play, delight, and deliberation. His most recent book is Meaningful Inefficiencies: Civic Design in an Age of Digital Expediency, published in 2020.*

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