

MASSACHUSETTS PLANNING

A publication of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association



American Planning Association
Massachusetts Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

Fall 2024

An aerial photograph of a suburban town in Massachusetts during autumn. The scene is filled with houses of various colors and styles, interspersed with trees showing vibrant fall foliage in shades of orange, red, and yellow. A central road runs through the town, and rolling hills are visible in the background under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

The Affordable Homes Act

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Cover: West Brookfield, Massachusetts

From the President



Welcome to another edition of *Massachusetts Planning*. This edition is coming to you just as registration is opening for the annual SNEAPA Conference to be held in Springfield this year on November 7 and 8. We're excited to welcome people back to The City of Firsts and are looking forward to an exciting conference. The rest of the program will be announced soon, but we are already excited about Strong Town's Chuck Marohn's Keynote Address on Thursday.

While many of us are engaged in conference planning, others are holding down the fort supporting the chapter's myriad of other activities. Our Board gathered in Plymouth for a day-long retreat focused on strategic planning and prioritization. We have upcoming education and social events – I'd link them here, but they're both sold out! We look forward to more events as we get deeper into fall and hope you, our members, are as excited about what's to come as you are about the events we currently have posted.

Our annual call for award nominees is officially open. Visit our website to learn more about the categories and how to make a nomination. We can't wait to read about the amazing things you've accomplished!

Ralph Willmer, Legislative & Policy Officer, is coordinating with MAPC and others to submit an amicus brief in the Milton MBTA zoning case to be heard by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court later this year.

If you haven't already, please take our chapter's survey about the Tufts UEP Program. As you know, Tufts UEP is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) and is in the process of renewing their accreditation. The survey can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/2dwtmm6>. At this point, we are only seeking feedback on the Tufts UEP Program; other PAB-Accredited programs will be come up for re-accreditation in the coming years.

A heartfelt and gigantic congratulations to APA-MA Treasurer Lee Pouliot and his husband on the birth of their first son, Elio!!!

We hope you will be able to join us for SNEAPA this year. If we don't see you in Springfield, we look forward to seeing you at one of our other events this fall.

Alison

Alison LeFlore, AICP
president@apa-ma.org

The Affordable Homes Act: Catalyzing Affordable and Market-Rate Housing Production

by Judi Barrett

The Affordable Homes Act (AHA) gives Massachusetts cities and towns new tools to address housing needs, boost supply, and attract state investment in homes for low- and moderate-income families. The law makes over \$5 billion available over the next five years to catalyze affordable and market-rate housing production. Many communities will benefit directly from provisions earmarked for them, such as Shrewsbury, Wayland, Holyoke, Winchester, Lenox, Clinton, Scituate, and others. Housing authorities stand to gain from capital improvements and decarbonization in state-owned public housing. Of particular interest to city and town planning departments, the AHA includes \$25 million for community planning grants, \$20 million for Chapter 40R incentive payments, and several changes to the Zoning Act.

No zoning ordinance or by-law shall prohibit, unreasonably restrict, or require a special permit or other discretionary zoning approval for the use of land or structures for a single accessory dwelling unit...

For municipal planners, the most significant change is the Zoning Act amendment that makes Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) available as-of-right in every single-family zoning district throughout the Commonwealth. In February 2025 when the ADU provisions take effect, property owners will be able to apply for a building permit to create an ADU on the same lot as a single-family home. The AHA limits as-of-right ADUs to the lesser of 900 square feet or 50 percent of the floor area of the single-family home, but communities also set reasonable restrictions on size, bulk, height, and setbacks, and subject ADUs to site plan approval. More than one ADU on a single-family property requires a special permit. Finally, communities cannot require more than one parking space for an ADU or *any* additional parking for an ADU within a half-mile of public transportation.

The law allows communities to prohibit the use of ADUs for short-term rentals. This really matters for the state's vacation and resort towns. They will need to have a short-term rental registration process in place, zoning that determines

where short-term rentals can operate, and enforcement capacity.

Once the ADU laws takes effect, the statute will supersede existing zoning that does not conform. Most town meetings happen after the ADU effective date, which may cause some concern. However, given the cost to build an ADU (it's expensive!), most towns will not see many applications for building permits right away. The floodgates did not open in communities that already have bylaws and ordinances for as-of-right attached and detached ADUs.

APA-MA has sponsored two ADU information sessions (Aug. 27 and Sept. 10). The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) plans to make resources available online. Regional planning agencies, the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC), and other organizations will most likely host more training sessions soon.

The "Unmerger" Rule

In effect now, with no waiting period, is a less-discussed but significant change to G.L. c. 40A, § 6. It provides that adjacent lots under common ownership cannot be treated as a single lot for zoning purposes if, when the lots were created, they conformed to then-existing lot area, frontage, width, and other requirements and have at least 10,000 square feet of lot area and 75 feet of frontage, *and* they are in a district that allows single-family dwellings. There is a catch, however: single-family homes built on these lots cannot exceed 1,850 square feet and must have at least three bedrooms. Moreover, they cannot be used as seasonable homes or short-term rentals. If you think the "unmerger" rule sounds a little like Chapter 40Y, you're right! The intent seems to be "starter homes." Planners may soon be asked to estimate the impact of this change on the potential for housing growth on lots once considered unbuildable.

Targeting Abutter Appeals

The legislature approved changes to G.L. c. 40A, § 17 to discourage appeals of special permits, site plan approvals, or variances. First, the amendments require a complainant to demonstrate "a particularized injury" from the

continued next page

Affordable Homes Act *cont'd*

zoning decision under appeal. Second, the amendments to Section 17 allow a judge to require plaintiffs to post a bond of up to \$250,000. The purpose is to cover damages and expenses if the court determines that the defendant's harm (the developer) outweighs the financial burden on the plaintiff to post surety. The court can consider the merits of the appeal, the plaintiff's ability to afford surety, and the financial means of the developer. Significantly, the court does not have to find that a plaintiff's appeal is motivated by bad faith or malice – a requirement the legislature removed from Section 17 under the AHA. However, a bad faith determination can result in a higher bond requirement to include costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

Veterans Preference

The AHA contains a new provision allowing cities and towns to work with developers and property owners to give low- or moderate-income veterans a preference for affordable housing. The preference can be up to 10 percent of the affordable units in a development approved under a local inclusionary zoning or density bonus bylaw. The veterans preference option seems to exclude developments in comprehensive permit projects under Chapter 40B, but it is also available to communities that submit a Housing Production Plan to EOHLIC – a

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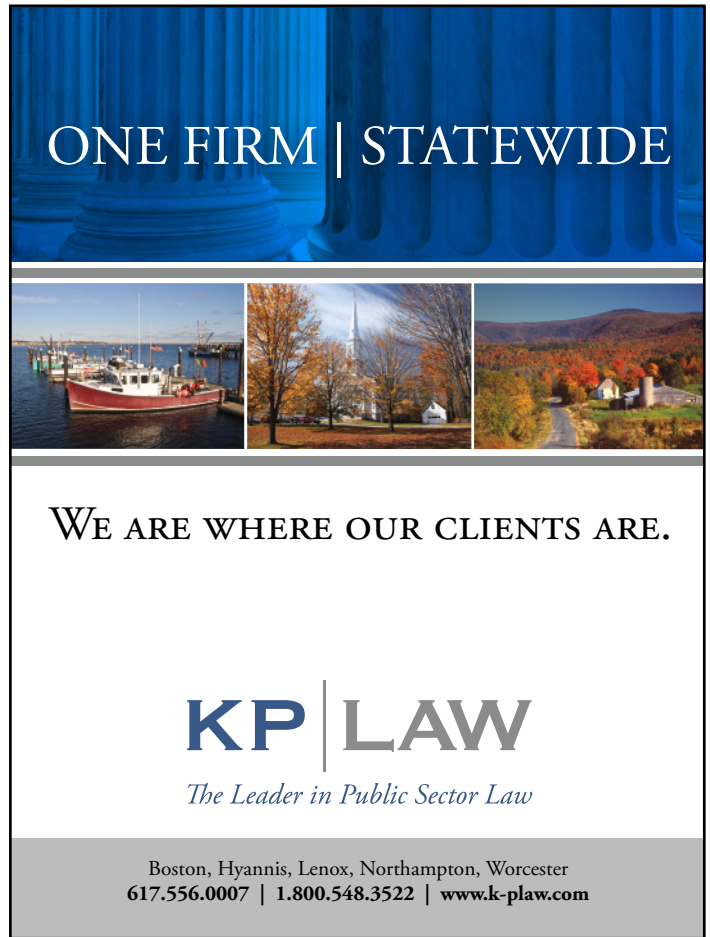
Affordable Homes Act *cont'd*

plan that explicitly falls within the Chapter 40B regulations (786 CMR 56.03(4)). Planners and housing coordinators familiar with affirmative fair housing marketing plans will want to consult with EOHLC for additional guidance about how to make this new opportunity available to qualified veterans (a term defined in G.L. c. 4, § 7).

Elephant in the Room

Conspicuously missing from the AHA is the local option real estate transfer fee on high-value real estate sales. It would have supplied capital for affordable housing trust funds statewide, especially for the Cape and Islands, where a dire need exists for year-round housing. Spearheaded by Nantucket years ago as a home rule petition, the transfer fee for affordable housing gained allies throughout Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard, and eventually Boston, Somerville, and Cambridge, and towns like Amherst. Gov. Healey understood the need and included the transfer fee in the housing bill she filed in October 2023. By the time the Senate finished its version of the bill in late June, the transfer fee had disappeared.

— Judi Barrett is principal of Barrett Planning Group, LLC. She can be reached at judi@barrettplanningllc.com.



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Making Time: The 15-Minute City

by Mark Favermann

One of my greatest regrets from graduate school is that I didn't take a course from urban theorist Kevin Lynch. His *Image of the City* (1960) is a modern classic about what does a city's form actually mean to the people who live there? What can the city planner do to make the city's image more vivid, memorable, and comfortable to the city dweller? Lynch's book was a guide for the building and rebuilding of cities. He was able to develop a concise, critical method for the evaluation of city form. This softly illustrated narrative is an accessible, tautly organized, authoritative volume that is as important to city building as another older classic by the Austrian urban theorist Camillo Sitté's *The Art of Building Cities* (1889). Both books have thoughtfully and strategically influenced architects, urban designers, planners, and landscape architects for generations.

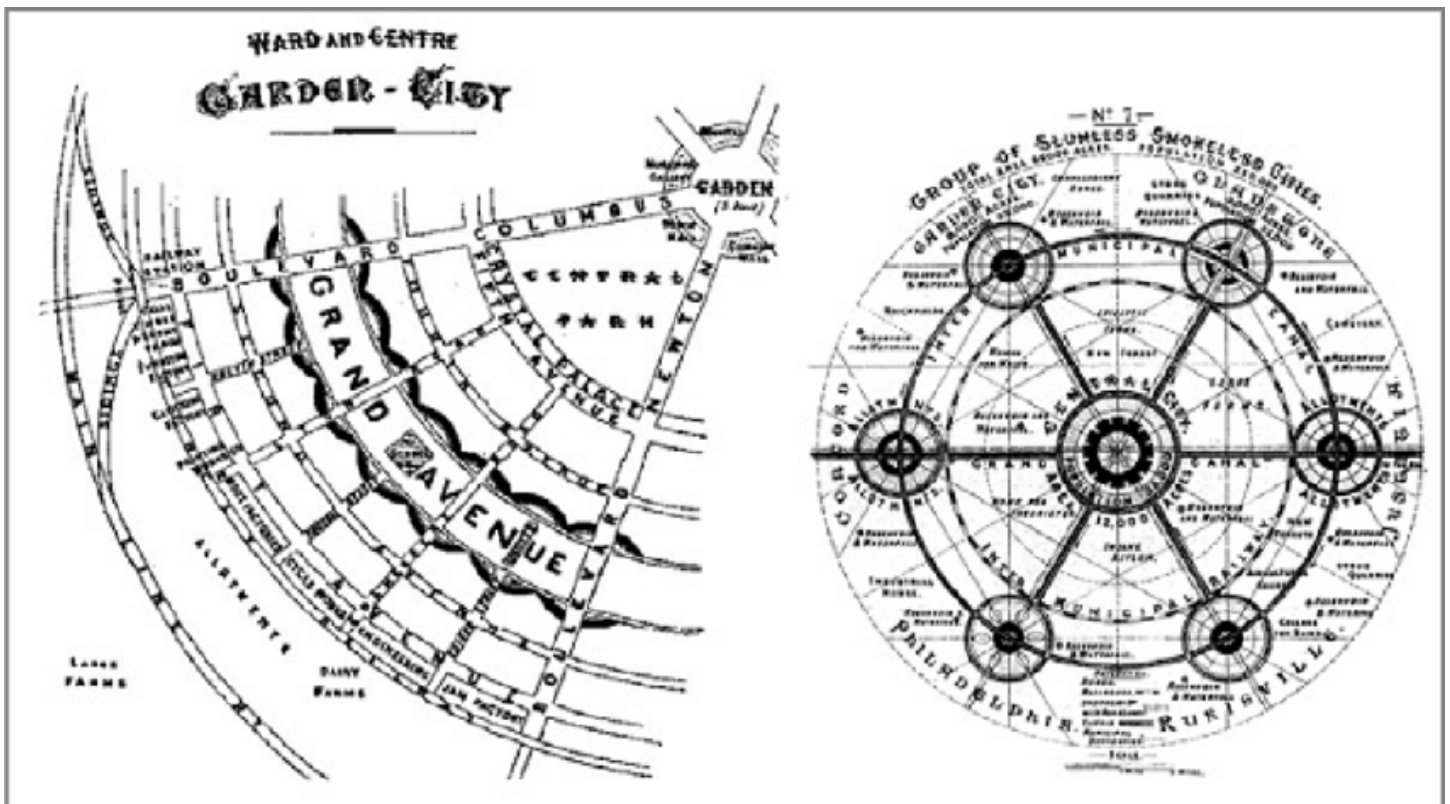
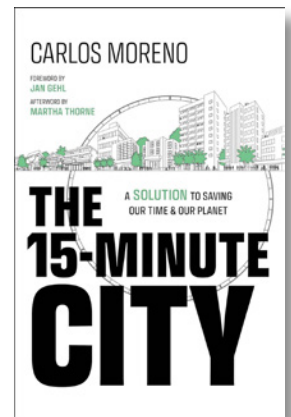
The two volumes suggest guidelines to enhance perception and to impart the notion of a city resident not only as a participant in urban society but a consumer of the various elements of urban form. While Sitté's approach to a city's physical organization was more about the almost magical cacophony and interest that variations of form and scale brought to the quality of urban life, Lynch's approach gives a more humanistic approach to the hierarchy of forms and structures that consciously or unconsciously underscore the urban

experience. So, it is a bit *unsettling* to grasp a recent variation on urban experience — *The 15-Minute City*.

It seems so simple, so relevant. Fifteen-minute cities are a planning concept focused on providing amenities close to where people live. Conceived of in 2016 by Carlos Moreno, a Colombian-born French scientist who is a professor at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University in Paris, *The 15-Minute City* postulates that providing needed services to residents within a 15-minute walking distance will lead to a physical environment that will automatically foster all desired outcomes of health, happiness, and sustainability. Somehow, safety seems to be an assumed or missing ingredient.

According to Moreno, it is a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to new ways of thinking about planning desirable cities. With a punchy three-word title, it has been rapidly adopted by many urban professionals as the panacea to many urban ills. New Urbanists have glommed on to it: to them it fits somehow with New Urbanism five principles of mixed-use development, transit-oriented development, walkability, inclusion, diversity, and prevention of placelessness. I am not sure exactly how,

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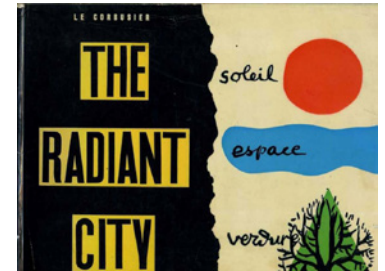
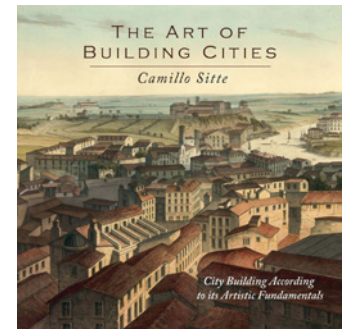
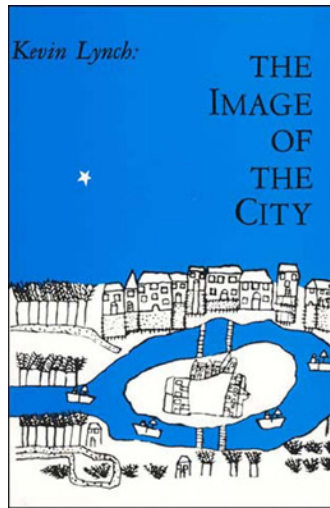
Plan of the Garden City by E. Howard

15-Minute City *cont'd*

however. Remember, Utopia was an imagined place or state of things where everything was perfect.

Is this just another faddish “city term”? Decades of urban theorists have suggested an abundance of urban titles: Le Corbusier’s *The Radiant City*, Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden City*, Massachusetts’s *Gateway City*, Joel Garreau’s *Edge City*, IBM’s and Walt Disney’s (*yes, that Walt Disney with his EPCOT*) *Smart City*, Archigram’s *Plug-In-City*, Bernard Tschumi’s *Event City*, Charles Montgomery’s *Happy City*, and even Lyndon Johnson’s *Model Cities*. But isn’t the 15-Minute City really about neighborhoods and small towns – not large cities as a whole?

Heavily dependent on a smooth-working transit system (are you listening, Massachusetts state legislators and the imperfect, *too often* unsatisfactory MBTA?) combined with a balanced coterie of easily accessible and appropriately mixed purveyors of goods and services, all will be well. Or will it? The 15-Minute City seems only fit for gentrified neighborhoods and affluent gated communities. Diversified income and even predominately working-class neighborhoods like Boston’s East Boston, Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester (with multiple neighborhoods within) are in part “food deserts” lacking enough convenient grocery stores. These less affluent neighborhoods can be drugstore-deficient, too. Recent lawsuits have identified unfair, price differentiation as



well. In a perfect world, there would be no inflation either.

The *often-rancorous* religious fervor of those who give voice to doing away with individual cars does not necessarily *focus on the whole picture*. Bicycles, scooters, and mopeds just don’t work for everyone. Gung-ho transportation planners have an all-or-nothing future-perfect approach to bike lanes, even when they are not used very much. There are also generational and familial differences in perspectives and expectations. Sure, healthy, fit young to middle-aged individuals are most capable of finding

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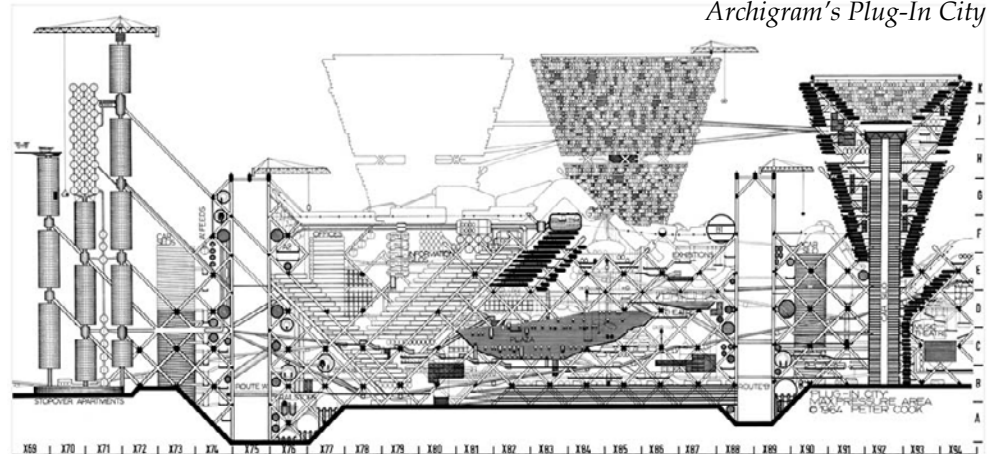
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optional modes of mobility. How about the single mom with two or three kids that needs to go shopping for groceries for the week? A bike even with large enough baskets and a wagon hitched to it would be impractical if she doesn't have a babysitter. Universal daycare would certainly help, but that does not seem to be part of the 15-Minute approach.

And how about the growing population of the elderly who have personal mobility issues (bad knees, arthritis, balance issues, etc.) on limited incomes who cannot afford home delivery of groceries? It goes without saying that ill and/or disabled individuals have little place in the 15-Minute City as well. Caregivers, emergency vehicles, nearby medical appointments, etc. — *Fuhgeddaboutit...*

Recently, the 15-Minute City notion has been steeped in conspiratorial controversy. The 15-Minute City notion has become central to conspiracy theories about personal freedom, anti-vaxing, and climate change. While the original idea is based on rethinking urban planning to make sure no one is traveling more than 15

Recently, the 15-Minute City notion has been steeped in conspiratorial controversy. The 15-Minute City notion has become central to conspiracy theories about personal freedom, anti-vaxing, and climate change.



minutes by bicycle or on foot to reach essential services, various far-right posts online falsely and vehemently fabricated a dystopian vision where people are forcibly prevented from leaving home. These *diatribes* referenced municipal ideas and potential agendas that wanted to limit road and street access at *particular hours* and designated days as limiting their personal freedom, regulating their lives, and crushing their human rights.

Earlier this year, the concept leaked into mainstream British politics. The Conservative Party's former Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper told an audience that he was against "sinister plans" by local town governments to "decide how often you go to the shops, and that they can ration who uses the roads and when." Deep State or deeply misinformed?

Certainly, there are some wonderful things about the 15-minute city: a great vision of enriched neighborhoods being full of lots of different amenities; and the sustainability of access to lots of things without driving a car. Diversity is desirable, but income gaps limit participation by many less fortunate individuals. Therefore, if the goal is a better integrated city, then the 15-minute city needs to be avoided. Logically, a metropolis-wide vision of a city supersedes one that focuses only on small neighborhoods. In his 1976 book, *What Time is This Place?*, Kevin Lynch did not envision a limited 15-minute city, but more an equitable, expandable *shared place in realistic time*.

— Mark Favermann is principal of Boston-based Favermann Design, a creative urban design and planning practice involved in community branding, wayfinding, strategic placemaking, storefront and façade enhancement, beautiful and functional streetscapes, and compelling public art. He is a noted writer/critic, speaker and sculptor.

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SNEAPA Comes to Springfield November 7-8

by Alison LeFlore, AICP, and Alyssa Sandoval, AICP, Conference Co-chairs

On behalf of the SNEAPA 2024 Conference Committee, we are pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Chapter of APA (APA-MA) has the pleasure of hosting our fellow chapters from Connecticut and Rhode Island, welcoming nearly 500 planners and allied professionals to the City of Springfield on November 7 and 8. Registration for the conference is set to open by September 23. Visit www.sneapa.org to reserve your spot!

Hotels must be booked by October 4, so book early! You must use our unique reservation link to get the conference rate: <https://tinyurl.com/4m2rr5hj>

We are also excited to have unveil some new programs which will energize the overall experience that attendees that come to expect. This year we will have:

- **Charles “Chuck” Marohn**, the founder and president of Strong Towns, who will be giving the keynote address and providing a thought-provoking presentation on conventional traffic engineering and better ways to design transportation for stronger communities
- **Young and Emerging Planners (YEP) Hub** with a broad array of programs and activities for students and emerging planners but open to all attendees who could use help with resume critiques, professional headshots, and other career development activities

The regular program boasts breakout room sessions covering topics like housing, economic development, community engagement, placemaking, and much more. Additional sessions will satisfy the new credit requirements covering the areas of equity, ethics, law, and sustainability and resilience. Many mobile workshops will serve as opportunities to visit unique places within the City of Springfield and the nearby cities of Chicopee and Holyoke.

The program boasts sessions covering topics like housing, economic development, community engagement, placemaking, and much more. Mobile workshops will serve as opportunities to visit unique places nearby.

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The conference will offer unique opportunities to network and socialize with fellow planners and other professionals. Scheduled breaks between sessions and daily lunches offer attendees chances to network by meeting new people and reconnect with friends and colleagues. This year the conference adds a new Mix and Mingle with Planners at the Lion Brewery on November 6 from 7 to 9 p.m. and a Springfield early morning walk hosted by SNEAPA conference committee members around Downtown Springfield on Friday morning. The Conference Reception is being held at the Armory at the MGM Springfield on Thursday evening, November 7, a short walk away from the Conference Center. The Armory and MGM development is the embodiment of the intersection of planning, economic development, and investment efforts by the City of Springfield.

We would also like to thank the Conference Committee for all its hard work, new ideas, and contributions towards planning a successful conference. Hope to see you all in November!

UMass Boston's Summer Program in Urban Planning Introduces BPS Students to Planning Practice and Careers

by Calvin J. Anton, Dr. Sowmya Balachandran, and Dr. Kenneth M. Reardon

In 2022, the UMass Boston's Department of Urban Planning and Community Development launched the Summer Program in Urban Planning (SPUP) to introduce youth of color from Boston's most underserved communities to the many exciting public service careers within the fields of urban planning, design, and development. The overarching goal of this new experiential education program is to address the longstanding underrepresentation of persons of color within the field of urban planning. Currently, 5.2% of Boston's practicing planners are persons of color in a city where they comprise more than 50% of the population.

The UPCD's Summer Program in Urban Planning engages youth of color, between the ages of 14 and 18 enrolled in BPS high schools in field-based learning experiences with public, private, and non-profit urban planning, development, and sustainability agencies across Boston. Over forty BPS high school students

The UPCD's Summer Program in Urban Planning engages youth of color between the ages of 14 and 18 enrolled in BPS high schools in field-based learning experiences with public, private, and non-profit urban planning, development, and sustainability agencies across Boston.



SPUP Students observing the living model of the City of Boston, City of Boston Planning Department, Boston City Hall, Boston, MA.

High School Student Testimonial:

"I really enjoyed the program, and meeting new people and learning new skills. I felt supported and encouraged to learn by having mentors who had an "open-door policy." Some of the exciting skills I learned during the summer program, includes QGIS Mapping, Data Analysis, and how to write a resume and cover letter. While with the City of Boston, I recall enjoying the process of synthesizing community feedback into "themes" that are used in the process of understanding community members' concerns and issues. This was an exciting summer!"

— 10th Grade Student,
Boston Collegiate Charter School, BPS

have been introduced to contemporary urban planning practice through this program. In 2022, participating students received APA MA Chapter's "Best Student Project" for their study of extreme heat in Lower Roxbury. This spring seven BPS students completed their first university course, Introduction to Urban Planning, on a tuition-free basis. This fall two of the program students will be embarking on their college careers as students at Roxbury Community College. For the 2024-25 edition of the Summer Program in Urban Planning, we introduced two tracks — the Urban Scholars and the Field-Based-Training-Experience.

The Urban Scholars track involved two components; a morning comprised of traditional high school courses, followed by an urban planning and community development elective course, and field-based work placement in the afternoon. The goal was to prepare new cohorts of students for college and careers in the built environment. The alternative track involved returning cohort students receiving cutting-edge paid work experience. In the three years of programming, placement agencies have included the Planning Department (earlier known as BPDA), the UMass Campus Planning Office, the transportation department at the City of Boston, the School for the Environment's Paleo Lab, the

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Three SPUP students presenting work they completed while with the City of Boston Planning Department at the program's end of summer showcase.

SPUP *cont'd*

MAPC, ARROWSTREET Architects, A Better City, and the 100 Resilient Cities.

In Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, twelve students will earn up to six college credits through courses at the School for the Environment at UMass Boston, to discover topics at the intersection of the built environment and climate change. Our goal is to strive to create complete pathways for youth of color. This includes fostering

Faculty Advisor Testimonials:

"The BPS students participating in this program are deeply committed to making a difference in their community. They have also demonstrated an intense curiosity and interest in the work planners do to build a more vibrant, sustainable, and just Boston. Working with these youth has been a pure joy!"

— Kenneth M. Reardon PhD,
Program Advisor & Professor Emeritus, UMass Boston

"Each student in the program comes with invaluable lived experiences. I learn from them as much as they learn from me. This work presents an immense opportunity to help our Boston High School Students find their voice and expression, and for us urban planning professionals to engage in practices of cultural humility and healing."

— Sowmya Balachandran PhD,
Program Director & Assistant Professor, UMass Boston

avenues for them to undertake four-year college, an accredited master's program, and paid internships to prepare them for future careers in urban planning. This year we are funded by generous contributions from the BPDA and the Liberty Mutual Foundation.




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Future Vision for the SPUP:

In our visioning event held earlier this year, three areas of growth were identified, detailed here:

- **Bring together UMass Boston community allies** – understand and leverage assets and allies within and outside UMass Boston. Understand their needs and priorities and find common ground to work together.
- **Advisory group** – Constitute an advisory group of like-minded staff and faculty at UMass Boston and placement agencies interested in BIPOC communities.
- **Redesign the program** – Redesign the high school intervention at UMass to center BIPOC communities and enhance pathways to leadership and professional positions that can make a difference.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the individuals, agencies, and communities who have and continue to make the SPUP possible:

Partner Agencies: Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), City of Boston, UMass Boston Sustainable Solutions Lab.

Funders: Liberty Mutual Foundation and Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA).

Program Manager & UMass Boston Planning Student Testimonial:

“Students taking part in this program are curious and ready to learn. In a field widely misunderstood, it is inspiring to be involved in changing that and proactively exposing curious and ambitious youth to a professional field with endless opportunities. As a first-generation college, and now graduate student, I have a strong affinity for programs such as the SPUP. I am cognizant of the challenges students face when navigating high school and post-secondary education with little support or resources. I feel honored to be part of a program that provides mentoring to undersourced students and connects them with placement agencies where they can develop technical and soft skills that can be leveraged in their future endeavors. I look forward to following the outcomes of these future leaders of Boston, the Commonwealth, United States, and beyond.”

— Calvin J. Anton, Urban Planning and Community Development Graduate Student & Program Manager of the Summer Program in Urban Planning at UMass Boston

Planning Community: Alison LeFlore, American Planning Association – Massachusetts (APA-MA) Chapter President and Angela Brooks, APA National President.

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Legislative and Policy Report

by Ralph R. Wilmer, FAICP, Legislative & Policy Officer

The legislative session ended in a flurry of activity (and some “inactivity” on a number of bills) on July 31. The MA Chapter of APA had been tracking a number of bills and budget items, which are summarized below:

- Most importantly, the Affordable Homes Act was signed into law by Governor Healey on August 6, 2024. See the article summarizing this law on page 3.
- On the budgetary front, funding for the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, which provides funding for the regional planning agencies to offer technical assistance to their municipalities, was level-funded at \$3 million.
- Although the Affordable Homes Act was adopted, other housing legislation did not make it to the finish line including the codification of inclusionary housing and the real estate transfer tax.
- Legislation that would mandate training for planning and zoning board members and codify site plan review in MGL c. 40A were incorporated into the housing legislation but were ultimately dropped out.

- The Municipal Empowerment Act that would provide a variety of tools for cities and towns, including making permanent the ability to convene remote and hybrid meetings, did not pass either the House or the Senate.
- Efforts to finalize economic development legislation before the end of the session failed as differences between the House and Senate versions could not be reconciled. It included the creation of a downtown vitality fund, would allow the re-establishment of happy hours, expand liquor licenses in Boston, and expand broadband access. In late breaking news, it appears that an agreement has been reached to add 225 liquor licenses over three years in Boston, mostly in underserved neighborhoods.
- The Climate and Energy Siting bill did not pass. This includes a number of provisions including streamlining the process for siting clean energy projects, improvements to the EV procurement process for buses, and a drought management program.
- Legislation to create an Environmental Justice Trust Fund did pass. The fund could provide resources for disadvantaged communities to support environmental restoration projects.



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Lawn and Order

Curated by Jeff Mills, Publisher



conversation in July on the Massachusetts Planners listserve (an online discussion forum) addressed the “growing” interest in pollinator-friendly yards, and the conflicts that sometimes arise when historically bucolic suburban landscapes become...less tidy. The following excerpts come from that conversation — and then we open up the discussion to our esteemed “AI panelists.”



EXCERPTS FROM THE CONVERSATION THAT FOLLOWS:

I love seeing so much interest from planners in more naturalized landscape approaches! You might all be interested in following Ben Vogt, whose efforts at growing and maintaining a prairie yard in a typical subdivision got him a lot of experience in addressing these concerns. He even has [tips to avoid getting fined](#) by the community/HOA. “Cues to Care” are integral to the acceptance of these efforts, and as noted by others can be hard to define.

[Research from UMass by Susannah Lerman](#) and her team indicates mowing every two weeks is ideal for maintaining lawns at a “respectable” (to your neighbors) level while allowing growth of plants supporting birds, bees, and other insects. Meanwhile, an article from PENN cites Minnesota Extension/UMN Bee Labs’ four-inch mowing height recommendation — but when I mow our lawn to three inches my husband doesn’t think I’ve cut it at all! (The struggle is real, even for landscape architects!)

—Rebecca Bachand, RLA, LEED AP, ASLA, RBLA Design LLC

THE DISCUSSION IS SEEDED:

My Code Enforcement team wants to beef up our regulations around height of grass/mowing requirements and “unsightly property.” We have more and more residents wanting to participate in No Mow May and/or who are raising environmental concerns around maintenance of lawns overall. The problem for Code Enforcement is that they are getting complaints from residents who want to maintain the orderly suburban aesthetic of a mown lawn. Do any of your communities have a bylaw defining and regulating something along the lines of “unsightly property” that you think works well?

—Corrin Meise-Muuns, Director of Planning & Community Development, Town of Longmeadow

I am 100% on Team Pollinator/Re-Wilding myself, however I believe that every community needs to have some plan for how to differentiate between an intentionally designed, well-managed pollinator garden or meadow landscape vs. owner negligence/abandonment of care, which could constitute a nuisance that neighbors would likely and rightly consider problematic. Private property (yard) rights are not 100% sacrosanct if there is a valid public interest in regulating potential negative impacts on abutters (e.g., pests, fire, etc.). Regulating neglected property is well within the wheelhouse of planning for health, safety, and welfare. People who don’t want to mow for ecological reasons should be able to demonstrate care satisfactorily to neighbors and town officials.

continued next page

Lawn and Order *cont'd*

Maybe neighbors just need to communicate better with one another during No-Mow May and Low-Mow Spring?

—Mark Hamin PhD, Strategic Planning Consultant, Sustainability Designer

I don't know what it would look like, nor of any precedents (as far as regulations go), but I suspect you could establish an approved ratio of mowed to un-mowed lawn, essentially requiring some degree of cues-to-care, like mowed borders or pathways. Or perhaps waivers to the current regulations could be issued for households submitting a plan for some level of lawn conversion, to promote long-term pollinator support.

—Nathanael Card, M.S. Ecological Design, 2024, The Conway School, Northampton, MA

I believe what is being proposed (as I understand it) is a bit of overreach here, and not sure is the best use of enforcement authority to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community. The basic enforcement of zoning, codes, noise by-laws, etc. is tough enough as it is for local officials, and then you want to add enforcing "lawn height" to the mix. Could you even imagine the civil

Every community needs to have some plan for how to differentiate between an intentionally designed, well-managed pollinator garden or meadow landscape vs. owner negligence/abandonment of care, which could constitute a nuisance that neighbors would likely and rightly consider problematic.

disputes between neighbors that local officials would have to mediate? That already plays out now here with warring neighbors tattling on each other, and then sending us, the local government, videos and copies of social media diatribes and expect us to resolve disputes.

—Kristina Johnson, AICP, Director of Planning and Community Development, Town of Hudson

I don't have suggestions for addressing the problem of overgrown lawns, but I'm guessing I'm not the only one who smiled when seeing the question came from the community of...Longmeadow.

—Danielle McKnight, AICP, Town Planner/Community Planning Administrator, North Reading



For fun, we asked ChatGPT to imagine a panel discussion between a municipal planner, a landscape architect, and a town selectman concerned about property values. The exchange riffs on traditional lawn values vs. habitat/pollinator/resource management values of less-kept lawns, and how to think about "unsightly property" and "blight" rules in this evolving landscape.

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Thank you all for joining us today. Our discussion focuses on the evolving landscape of property values, traditional lawn aesthetics, and the importance of habitat and resource management. Let's begin with opening statements from each of our panelists. Landscape Architect, please start.

Landscape Architect: Thank you. As a landscape architect, I see immense value in transitioning from traditional, manicured lawns to more ecologically friendly designs. Less-kept lawns that support native plants and pollinators are essential for biodiversity. They reduce the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides, promoting a healthier environment.

Municipal Planner: I appreciate that perspective. From a municipal planning standpoint, we must balance ecological benefits with community standards and property values. Well-maintained properties traditionally signal a thriving community, but we need to reconsider what "well-maintained" means in today's context of environmental sustainability.

Town Selectman: Property values are a significant concern for homeowners. Many believe that unkempt lawns

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Lawn and Order *cont'd*

decrease property values and contribute to neighborhood blight. It's crucial to find a compromise that maintains property values while supporting ecological benefits.

Moderator: Let's dive deeper into these issues. **Landscape Architect, how do you address concerns about property values?**

Landscape Architect: Studies have shown that properties with sustainable landscaping can actually increase in value. Homebuyers are increasingly eco-conscious, and native plantings that support local wildlife can be a selling point. It's about educating the public and shifting perceptions from seeing these landscapes as "messy" to seeing them as valuable ecosystems.

Municipal Planner: That's an important point. However, we must also consider existing regulations and community standards. How do we revise "blight" rules to reflect these changing values without alienating residents accustomed to traditional lawns?

Property values are a significant concern for homeowners. Many believe that unkempt lawns decrease property values and contribute to neighborhood blight.

Town Selectman: That's where public education and gradual change come in. Perhaps we could pilot programs in certain areas, showcasing the benefits of habitat-friendly lawns. This way, residents can see firsthand the beauty and functionality of these spaces.

Moderator: How do you propose handling the aesthetic concerns of residents who view less-kept lawns as unsightly?

Landscape Architect: Design is key. Less-kept doesn't mean neglected. It's about thoughtful planting and maintaining a balance. Clear edges, defined paths, and a mix of structured and natural elements can create visually appealing landscapes that also support biodiversity.

Municipal Planner: We might also consider incentives for homeowners who adopt these practices—for example, tax breaks or grants for installing native plants and pollinator gardens. It's about creating a supportive framework for change.

Town Selectman: That's a good idea. We should also involve local community groups and schools in these initiatives, fostering a sense of pride and ownership over these new landscapes.

Moderator: How do we measure success in this transition?

Landscape Architect: Success can be measured in multiple ways: increased biodiversity, reduced water usage, lower maintenance costs, and community satisfaction. Surveys and ecological studies can provide quantifiable data to support the benefits of these landscapes.

Review and update municipal codes and regulations to support sustainable landscaping while ensuring they align with community standards.

Municipal Planner: Additionally, monitoring property values over time in areas that adopt these practices will be crucial. We need to ensure that these changes positively impact homeowners financially.

Town Selectman: Community feedback is essential. Regular town meetings and forums to discuss progress and address concerns will help maintain transparency and support.

Moderator: To wrap up, what's the next step in moving forward with this initiative?

Landscape Architect: Begin with pilot projects and public education campaigns. Showcasing successful examples will help change perceptions.

Municipal Planner: Review and update municipal codes and regulations to support sustainable landscaping while ensuring they align with community standards.

Town Selectman: Engage the community through forums, incentives, and partnerships with local organizations. It's about building a shared vision for the future.

Moderator: Thank you all for this insightful discussion. It's clear that balancing traditional values with ecological needs is a complex but achievable goal.



Sara Asher Morris (Field)

NEWS FROM CPM | Consulting Planners' Perspective

by Kathleen "Kathy" McCabe, FAICP, Vice-President, Consulting Planners of Massachusetts



RFP Tips and Reminders

The consulting planner community enjoys and depends upon work from local cities and town. Request for Proposals (RFPs) and quotes are how many of us are retained. Here are a few tips and suggestions for better RFPs and quotes.

Scope and Deliverables. Please take the time before issuing an RFP to think about the specific problem or issue your community wishes to tackle, and the assistance you are requesting. Reviewing other RFPs may provide you with ideas, or seemingly make it easier to get that RFP posted. The needs of your community, however, may not be identical to another. Before you copy and paste, think about what your community needs and is looking for. Include this information in the RFP.

Allow enough time to respond. It takes time to prepare a thoughtful response to a Request for Proposals. Although the minimum time requirement is two weeks, it is often better to provide three to six weeks for a response time. This allows adequate time to distribute the RFP and get the word out, time for questions, and time to prepare a submission.

Consider digital submissions. Some communities are still requesting multiple copies, sometimes even ten or twelve copies of a submission. This costs money, resources, and takes time. Consider an all-digital submission, or one hard copy to accompany a digital submission.

Quotes versus RFPs. Massachusetts now allows municipalities to solicit quotes for goods and services for projects not exceeding \$50,000.00. Quotes are awarded on the basis of cost, not quality of services. A firm responding to a quote only has to demonstrate the ability to provide the requested services and be the low bidder to win the contract, the Procurement officers only need to invite three quotes. RFPs are awarded upon the basis of qualifications and approach, based on the evaluation criteria specified in the RFP, followed by a review of costs. The most qualified proposer wins unless there is a significant cost discrepancy.

CPM is a resource to help you find the right consultant. Consulting Planners of Massachusetts will gladly post your RFP or quote. CPM routinely sends out announcements to our members about available RFPs and quotes. Please send your RFP or quote announcement to: TreasurerCPM@aol.com for posting. You can also use the Consulting Planners Directory to identify potential consultants as to area of expertise to send out quotes and RFPs. See: www.consultingplanners.org/directory.

In 2024 CPM anticipates hosting a workshop on best practices for procurement to decipher the procurement process and make it easier to secure consulting services for your community.

Save the Date — King Tides Walking Tour & Lunch

Sea levels are rising. Come see and explore the impact of King Tides and rising sea levels at a fun, informative walking tour and luncheon on **Friday, October 18, 2024**, in East Boston. Consulting Planner of MA members Nitsch Engineering and Weston & Sampson will guide the tour and share information about the challenges of rising waters and resiliency strategies. Hear about the Interim Flood Protection Plan and the Resilient Border Street plan.

The walking tour will begin at LoPresti Park in East Boston, which is a short walk from the Maverick Street station on the Blue Line or a slightly longer walk from the East Boston Ferry terminal at Lewis Wharf. You can catch the East Boston Ferry at Long Wharf in Downtown Boston, near the Aquarium.

For details/registration visit: www.consultingplanners.org.



Rising waters at Long Wharf with Weston & Sampson planners illustrating the process at CPM King Tide walk.

Community Planning and Ecological Design (CoPED) Summer Program – The 2024 Edition in Lentini (Sicily, Italy)

by Calvin J. Anton and Dr. Antonio Raciti

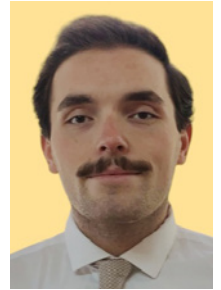
The Community Planning and Ecological Design (CoPED) Summer Program is a joint learning venture between the Department of Urban Planning and Community Development at UMass Boston (Boston, Massachusetts), the School of Public Policies and Public Affairs at the University of Memphis (Memphis, Tennessee), and the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Catania (Catania, Sicily). Each summer, in June, faculty and graduate students from each university immerse themselves in a community on the Eastern Coast of Sicily for two weeks. During this time, there is a rich exchange of cultures, ideas, and skills between US and Italian students and local members of the host community. With faculty members' mentorship, students can apply and leverage these newly developed skills to empower local governments, community members, and organizations to address challenges they have identified in their community.

CoPED Process in a Nutshell

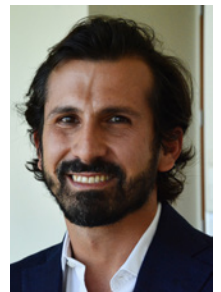
CoPED activities are designed and organized along two streams. The first one consists of data collection and analysis, as well as design and policy-making activities requiring methodological expertise. Basic methodological training is provided within the program context, so students are not required to have any specific disciplinary background. However, advanced training occurs via mutual learning, thanks to the diversity of participants' backgrounds. The second one consists of participatory research and design activities engaging all interested community members. These include open house events; participatory mapping or co-design events; "best practices" public exhibits to inspire community members' imagination of what is possible; etc.

By alternating both streams, during the two weeks, students, faculty and their community partners develop a neighborhood development plan to guide action in the chosen community.

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Calvin Anton



Dr. Antonio Raciti



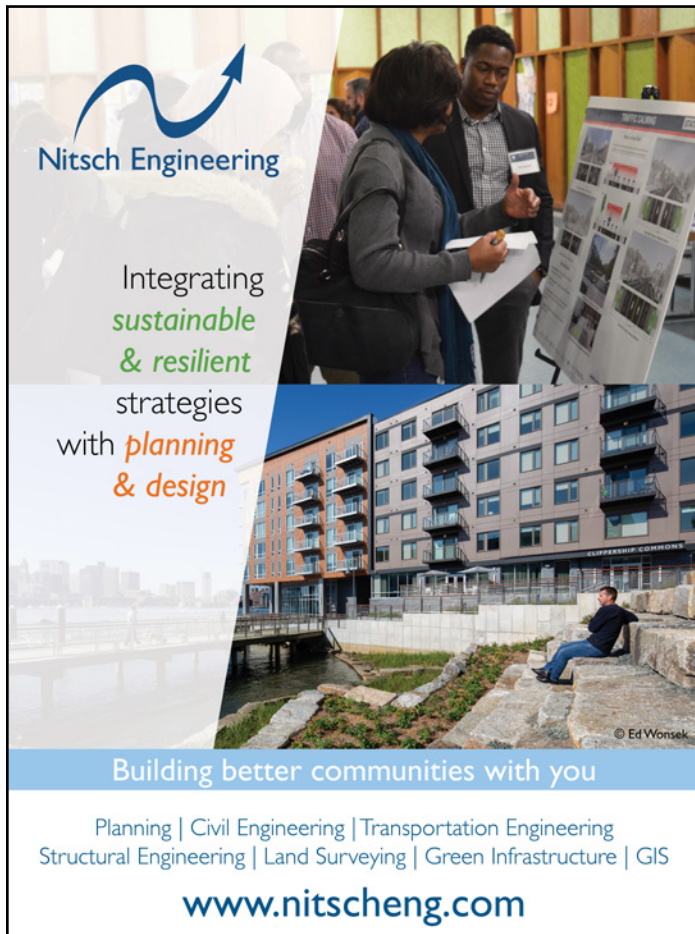
CoPED participants interacting with community members during the town festival in the Lentini Downtown public square.

CoPED 2024 Goes to Lentini (Siracuse)

This past summer, the program completed its 10th edition in Lentini, Sicily, a suburban municipality with a population of roughly 20,000 in the Siracuse Province. Over the past four decades, this community, like the Sicilian region more broadly, has experienced a significant decline in its population. Particularly, the San Paolo – Spitali Vecchio neighborhood of this municipality has experienced a disproportionate amount of abandonment and dis-investment when compared to other Lentini neighborhoods. Given community members’ and organization’s concerns for this area, the program focused on developing a series of proposals and an overall plan to address the identified challenges, bringing a ray of hope to the community.

Before arriving in Sicily, students from each university were required to examine a series of case studies and other reading material relevant to the challenges faced by the San Paolo-Spitali Vecchio community. Once in Lentini, the main public meetings included a -co-design workshop to discuss background research on the neighborhood and elicit ideas to address the main challenges. The co-design workshop included a plenary event in a downtown public facility followed by small workshops carried out in the historic courtyards interspersed in the

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CoPED participants talking with San Paolo-Spitali Vecchio residents while canvassing the neighborhood.



CoPED participants tabling during the town festival in the Lentini Downtown public square.

CoPED cont'd

historic center. The second event was the co-design festival hosted in the Lentini Downtown public square, which culminated in a town festival with music and artists exhibitions. Lastly, a final city assembly was organized to give students the opportunity to present their research findings and the resulting neighborhood plan. As the program was coming to a close, community members, faculty, and students had a joint reflective session, discussing their CoPED experience in Lentini.

Final Notes

During CoPED, students do not only engage with the local community to figure out how to shape planning decisions, but they do that while they face the big challenges of navigating an unknown urban environment. They are not familiar with the local culture; they don't know the language; they are not familiar with the local history and customs. Yet, the school is designed to create a space for students traveling internationally to enter in relation with the local community with humbleness and compassion while using their various expertise to advance goals and objectives identified by the collective they work with.

Reflecting on the experience, Calvin Anton, who participated in the 2024 CoPED cohort, shared: "Participating in the CoPED summer program was an enriching experience that allowed me to apply planning knowledge and skills in a

pragmatic way to help address the challenges facing the Lentini community. I enjoyed developing an understanding of the cultural and institutional contexts in which we were operating, and getting to know peers from other universities, and the local community. I feel empowered by community members, and organizations' determination to addressing Lentini's challenges and look forward to tracking how the bright future of Lentini unfolds."

— Calvin J. Anton is a Master's of Urban Planning and Community Development Student and 2024 CoPED cohort participant, UMass Boston. Dr. Antonio Raciti is Professor of Urban Planning and Community Development, and CoPED Director, at UMass Boston.



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The PDO Corner

by Bill Nemser, AICP, MA Chapter PDO



My kids are older now and have left the nest. Thinking back to when they were smaller, I remember this was the time of year when I really would appreciate just how much the government can improve our lives with things like, umm, public schools.

Anyway, on behalf of APA-MA I would like to extend congratulations to the newest AICP APA-MA Chapter members:

- Jennifer Tabakin, AICP
- Zachary Gavel, AICP
- Conor McCormack, AICP
- Francesca M Cigliano, AICP
- Maria E. Skrut, AICP
- Felicia Jiang, AICP
- Kirsten Bryan, AICP
- Tatum N. Thomas, AICP
- Noah Harper, AICP
- Jiwon Park, AICP
- Erika D. Frazier, AICP
- Sally R. Miller, AICP
- Meghan Casey, AICP

APA-MA is very proud of your achievement! We hope you find APA-MA even more helpful as you maintain your CM credits and if you have not been to any of the Chapter’s events yet, we hope to see you in person!

Speaking of CM credits, as we move into autumn, keep an eye out for some very cool events brought to you both by the Chapter and in conjunction with our sister organizations Consulting Professionals of MA (CPM) and MA Association of Planning Professionals (MAPP). No better – or simpler – way to keep up with your credits!

Fall 2024, AICP Exam

As a reminder, the November 2024 AICP exam registration window opens on October 1st and closes on October 31. The exam window is open November 4-30, 2024.

Beginning in 2025 the Chapter is going to expand its AICP prep course offerings. Based on exam content we hope to add additional topics and expand time allotted to some of the core classes. Classes will be virtual and may be in conjunction with other chapters. The course schedule will be announced in early December.

Also, AICP has prepared a useful Certification Guide that will take you through the process. For more information on the One Path to AICP program, visit: www.planning.org/certification.

As always, feel free to reach out with any questions to pdo@apa-ma.org.

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