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STaR Annual Meeting

Thursday, September 8, 2022, at 4pm CDT via Zoom.



Beaumont Hotel, Ouray, Colorado, 1886. Photo courtesy of Char Shepard

Is It Zoom Boom or Doom? Initial Small Town & Rural Results May Vary

By John C. Shepard, AICP, Vice Chair-Communications

“A Zoom town is a community that experiences a significant population increase as due to an influx of remote workers.” In April 2021, a Wikipedia user added an entry to the online encyclopedia for Zoom Town, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_town surviving a battery of wiki-editors to be categorized alongside both urban planning and studies, and COVID-19 impacts. As of June 2022, that definition is how the Wikipedia article starts off. By the time you read this, it will probably have been changed, by either short-term trends or fickle cloud-source editing.

The Zoom town trend has been around since the early days of dial-up internet and “Lone Eagle” knowledge workers taking their work with them to small towns & rural areas across the United States, Canada, and just about anywhere with a decent broadband connection. This particular nickname is due to the ubiquity of the Zoom online videoconferencing platform as droves of people started working from home (and schooling at home) during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey by the Pew Research Center found that one in 20 US adults moved in 2020, either permanently or temporarily, in response to the pandemic.

In February 2021, *Bloomberg* was touting the Zoom Town Boom in Bozeman, Montana, the home of Montana State University and still a Micropolitan Statistical Area (Gallatin County) that has been attracting urban refugees since before *A River Ran Through It* filmed there in the 1990s. Average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment broke \$2,000 a month as the median home price hovered at \$700,000. The article called out other college towns like Missoula, Montana, and Durango, Colorado, for bringing New York prices to mountain homes. Bozeman and Gallatin County both have capable planning departments, although the City’s elected officials tend to be more progressive. Bozeman’s inclusionary zoning ordinance mandates 10% of all homes in new subdivisions be “affordable” and the



Main Street, Bozeman, Montana.
Photo source: Wikimedia Creative Commons

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STaR Division
2022 Executive Committee

Chair, Keith Marvin, AICP

Marvin Planning Consultants
David City, Nebraska
kmarvin@marvinplanning.com

Vice Chair – Programs

Mark Staples
City of Taft, California
mstaples@cityoftaft.org

Vice Chair – Communications

John C. Shepard, AICP
Consensus Planning, Inc.
Albuquerque, New Mexico
JCShepard.aicp@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer

Robert L. Barber, FAICP
Orion Planning & Design,
Hernando, Mississippi
Bob@orionplanningdesign.com

Student Representative

Open

Immediate Past Chair

Jessica Garrow, AICP
Design Workshop, Aspen, Colorado
jessicagarrowaicp@gmail.com

From the Chair

Hello all of my fellow STaR members. Happy Summer!

As I am writing this letter, a lot of the United States is experiencing a major heatwave. I hope this finds those of you “feeling the heat” finding ways to cool down.

NPC22

I hope all of you had a great time in San Diego in late April, early May. I had hoped to attend our in-person National Planning Conference but other items came up that need to be addressed rather than heading to California. Thank you to STaR Board Members Mark Staples, Bob Barber, and Jessica Garrow, as well as past Chair Chad Nabity, for representing STaR at the conference.

Business Meeting and Awards

A date has been set for the Annual Business Meeting. The business meeting will be held on Thursday, September 8, 2022, at 4:00 pm CDT. We will be holding it via Zoom and more details on the link will be sent out closer to the meeting date.... SO, MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

AICP and CM (Second Reminder in case you have yet to notice)

Key issues for those of you with the AICP designation... There have been changes made to the CM program which began January 1, 2022. These changes are:

1. Everyone with AICP is now on the same CM cycle
2. The 1.5-hour requirement for Law has been lowered to 1.0 hours
3. The 1.5-hour requirement for Ethics has been lowered to 1.0 hours
4. A new 1.0-hour requirement has been added for Equity
5. A new 1.0-hour requirement has been added for Sustainability and Resilience

Elections

This year finds STaR in the election cycle once again. The deadline has passed, and a slate of candidates will be available, and voting will begin sometime in July. Watch for the ballot email and the announcement on Interact.

Have a great Summer!

Follow APA STaR online so you don't miss any important news! At APA: <http://www.planning.org/divisions/smalltown/>
On LinkedIn: Search “APA Small Town & Rural Planning Division”
On Facebook: www.facebook.com/APA-Small-Town-and-Rural-Planning-Division
On Twitter: Follow [@APA_SmallTown](https://twitter.com/APA_SmallTown)



Election Time

It's that time of the year again. While the national mid-term elections aren't until November, you don't have to wait that long for the APA elections. Yes, members, it's APA election time!

IMPORTANT: Watch for an email about 19 July 2022 from APA Election Coordinator (mailto:noreply@directvote.net) **with ballot instructions.**

Division members may serve as chair for no more than two terms. The immediate past chair continues to serve as an executive board member until a new chair is elected; not more than two terms. In 2018, STaR members changed our bylaws so that all officers need to be paid members of the Division, and they must be a member for

at least one year prior to the election.

Nominations for the Small Town & Rural Planning Division Executive Committee for the next two-year cycle are listed below.

Chair:

- Mark Staples

Vice Chair of Programs:

- Bruce A. Fountain, AICP
- Mary T. Howard, AICP

Vice Chair of Communications:

- John C. Shepard, AICP

Secretary/Treasurer:

- Bob Barber, FAICP

Check out each candidate's nominating statement on the pages following.



Welcome to the new Tribal and Indigenous Planning Division

Tribal communities range from some of the smallest small towns and rural areas to some of the largest, by both population and area. The American Planning Association's CEO Joel Abrizo recently offered congratulations to the newly established Tribal and Indigenous Planning Division, the newest of 24 APA Divisions.

APA members in the Tribal and Indigenous Planning Interest Group have been working for several years to establish the Division. Their mission has

been "to promote awareness, communication and action on tribal and indigenous planning issues for tribal and indigenous planners, peoples, nations and their non-tribal partners", with core values of community and culture, honor and respect, and self-determination and sovereignty.

Members of the group have offered "Tribal Planning 101" sessions at chapter conferences, including the regional Western Planner Conference, and at the National Planning Conference.

Mark Staples, Chair



I am writing this letter as my notice of interest in running for the position of Chair of the Small Town and Rural (STaR) Planning Division. I have been a member of the STaR Division since 2013. In the fall of 2013, my planning career moved me from the metro area of Los Angeles and greater southern California area to the small town of Taft, California. I am the Director of the Planning and Development Services Department of the City of Taft, which has a population of approximately 7,000 people.

I have regularly attended past APA National Conferences and attended the STaR Business Meetings in Seattle, Phoenix, New York City, New Orleans, San Francisco, and San Diego. I have been drawn to the STaR Division as I have found my own small-town challenges in Taft being echoed and repeated in other STaR communities nationwide. I have found the STaR Division to function similarly in nature as my local section here in California, but with the advocacy, promotion, and outreach on more of a national level.

I have been serving as the STaR Division Vice-Chair of Programs since 2020, working with the STaR Board to continue the ongoing advocacy and promotion of the Division. I have conducted the STaR Division Awards Program for the 2021 and 2022 years. I have been working to boost STaR membership as past board members have mentioned it was once one of the larger divisions.

I would continue to focus on boosting membership and attendance at the National Conference by featuring Division member efforts and projects in their own communities through the newsletter and through STaR's social media sites. Finally, I would encourage the promotion of small town and rural planning efforts at the local section and state chapter level highlighting the small town and rural planning professionals and their projects that are due local, state and national attention.

My professional career began with pursuing an Architectural Technology degree at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, CA; then moving on to Urban and Regional Planning at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I have primarily worked on current planning project from my days as an intern at the City of Santa Ana; and eventually larger residential, commercial, and industrial projects as a full-time contract planner with the Cities of

Perris, Moreno Valley, Adelanto, Desert Hot Springs, Upland, and Rancho Santa Margarita, and the County of Riverside. Recently, I have been guiding the City of Taft ensuring quality development projects as well as updating the local General Plan, Housing Element, and Zoning Ordinance. Currently, I am working with the City Council, committees, and local residents on accelerating housing production, particularly affordable housing, through two State of California housing funding programs, including an update to our Downtown Taft Specific Plan.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination as Chair of the Small Town and Rural Planning Division. I look forward to serving and promoting the STaR Division and its members.

John C. Shepard, AICP, Vice-Chair of Communications

Small Town and Rural planning is much more than urban planning writ small. Small Town planners I have worked with across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain States often share more in common across the country than with the suburban and urban centers in their own states.

I am currently a planning consultant primarily serving small towns and rural jurisdictions across New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona and working mostly on comprehensive plans, economic development policy, and current planning projects. I graduated with planning degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Colorado at Denver.

I first joined the STaR Board in 2014 as Vice Chair-Communications. In 2016, we received recognition from the APA Divisions Council for Best Overall Communications Effort, including reviving quarterly STaR newsletters and integration of social media, and in 2017 again for our social media outreach. I took a hiatus for a year and returned to the board in 2019.

The STaR Board continues to work on communicating with our members across the country, and across the world. We were on Twitter and Facebook and LinkedIn during the National Planning Conference...and the rest of the year, too. We are trying Constant Contact for email management and are trying to keep up with



Zoom and other remote learning and collaboration opportunities. Our next big project will be rebuilding the Division website to better serve our members' needs. I would be pleased to continue serving our members and promoting Small Town & Rural Planning.

Robert Barber, FAICP, Secretary/Treasurer

STaR's ability to serve the interests of small town planners depends on sound management of Division resources. Balancing budgets, ensuring the prompt transaction of business, and maintaining accurate records may not be the most visible of tasks, but are essential to Division's health.

It's been my privilege to serve in this way over the past few years. We have increased the Division's operating margin, met or exceeded Division

accounting standards, and contributed to the consistency and stability needed for a well-functioning Division.

I have greatly benefitted from the work of STaR over the years and am thankful to be able to give back. I'm also thankful for the many relationships developed over the years through APA and look forward the opportunity to continue to serve as STaR Secretary-Treasurer.



Mary T. Howard, AICP, Vice-Chair of Programs



Now semi-retired, I have had the pleasure of serving the public for over 21 years in a variety of planning positions. As a planner for Greene County in the Hudson Valley of New York State, I assisted 14 towns and 5 villages with all of their land use regulation needs. Farmland protection, brownfield redevelopment, historic preservation, park development, US Census liaison, grant writing and rural transit system oversight are just some of my daily responsibilities for a county nestled along the Hudson River and dotted with some of the highest peaks in the Catskill Mountain range. The elements of rural transit appealed to me. When the opportunity came along to act as the Transit Grants and Procurement Specialist for the county just to the south, I happily transitioned to the position. Ulster County Area Transit provided me with the chance to broaden my transit and planning horizons.

Working full time, I managed to earn my Master's degree in

Urban and Regional Planning from the University at Albany over the course of six years. I attained AICP status in 2006 and have maintained my standing ever since.

The experience I gained at the county level allowed me to smoothly transition to the role of Intermodal Transportation Specialist for the New York State Department of Transportation. Here too I specialized in rural transit grant work and became quite proficient in navigating the ins and outs of the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) regulations. I administered state and Federal Transit Administration grant funds in excess of five billion dollars.

And, even with fulltime work and part-time studies, I served over twenty years as a volunteer firefighter with the Kiskatom Volunteer Fire Department in Catskill, NY and, for ten of those years, also was a volunteer member of Catskill Rescue Squad. Known by the local school children as "the Fire Lady," I experienced the best and worst of the traumatic moments in my neighbors' lives. Car crashes, tornadoes, house fires, brush fires, deaths, births and, yes, even getting a cat out of a tree – I've happily given my time and effort to my local community.

Since leaving state service in 2015, I have been both an independent consultant and

employee of other consulting firms as a Subject Matter Expert and Reviewer for small transit agencies and FTA to ensure federal compliance by transit systems across the country. Currently semi-retired, I am in my second term on the Planning Board of the Town of Clermont, NY (pop. 1,873) as a volunteer. I also led the newly created Parks Committee in the development of the town's park plan. Currently I chair the Clermont Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Update committee.

My fellow board and committee members benefit from my ongoing APA education efforts through the annual municipal training I offer pro bono.

Planning and Zoning Board of Appeal members from adjacent municipalities are also invited to attend the training sessions. Throughout my career, it has been my goal to share knowledge to help local government officials to better serve their communities.

Previously the Small Town and Rural Planning Division Secretary/Treasurer, I would like to continue serving the division as the Vice Chair for Programs. By sharing information, successes, difficulties and life lessons we, as planners, we can help our communities plan for the future, whatever challenges we face.

Bruce Fountain, AICP, Vice-Chair of Programs

BACKGROUND:

I grew up in small towns in Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois as my father managed farm implement stores throughout the Midwest. This gave me a tremendous respect and love of small-town America which is why I want to become more involved in APA's STaR Division.

I am currently the Community Development Director for the City of La Vista, NE, a suburban community just south of Omaha, NE. With a population of just over 17,000, La Vista prides itself in maintaining its small-town identity through numerous festivals and events sponsored and run by City staff. Prior to this, I was the Planning/Building Director for Sarpy County, NE. I have been responsible for budgeting and overall management of these departments including current planning, zoning, code enforcement, building, land use studies, economic development, and

infrastructure planning assistance. These positions have given me great experience with both small town and rural planning issues.

I am an AICP member and certified as an Economic Development Finance Professional (EDFP) by the National Development Council. I have been active in the Nebraska APA Chapter and Nebraska Planning and Zoning Association, serving as Chapter President and Past President on the Board. I served on the National Chapter Presidents Council's Leadership Committee and APA Nominating Committee as well. I have also served as a member of

the Olathe, Kansas Planning Commission and the Gretna, Nebraska City Council.

I have a bachelor's degree in Community and Regional Planning from Iowa State University, and a master's degree in Public Administration from Drake University.

POSITION STATEMENT:

As STaR Division Vice Chair - Programs, I would hope to continue the great work that the recent leadership has established the last several years.

I would look to aggressively recruit new members and encourage all to become more active in the Division to accomplish its strategic planning goals. I believe that any organization such as this gains its strength through the involvement of its members. I am a firm believer that what you get out of an organization is in a big way dependent on what you put into it through your time and talent. I want to see more members involved so we continue to bring new ideas to the Division.

An area of great interest to me is educating the public about the importance of planners and the planning profession, especially in smaller regions. I want to work through STaR to provide assistance and resources to its members in promoting the importance of planning to their communities. I'd like to see the APA Ambassadors program expand throughout small towns and rural areas. This program utilizes individuals and teams willing to volunteer their time, experience, and talents to advance the public understanding of planning and promote the



planning profession through activities and events in their local communities. I would like to see STaR provide its members more assistance in reaching out to schools, neighborhood associations, civic organizations, and the public so they know their local planners and the importance of their work to the community. I would especially like to see us work with schools to provide better education programs on local government and planning so students are aware of planning/zoning issues and the impacts on their lives as they become taxpayers.

In addition, I would work closely with STaR members to bring additional continuing education and training opportunities related to smaller towns and regions to the National Planning Conference, Chapter Conferences and through on-line availability. I feel we need diverse opportunities for training at our national conferences that include both small and large communities.

Zoom Boom or Doom?

-Continued from page 1

City has a Housing Action Plan but progress has been slow and demand still greatly exceeds supply.

Zoom towns are not limited to the mountain West, but do tend to be in areas with outdoor amenities, such as Vermont in the Northeast. The *BBC* reported in June 2021 on migrants from Los Angeles attracted to the Ozarks of Northwest Arkansas, at least in part due to lifestyle investments by the Walmart heirs. *High Country News* has reported on many aspects of the trend, including impacts of unearned income driving up housing prices in high-amenity areas like Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Truckee, California.

COVID-19 affected the employment market quickly and harshly, with the national unemployment rate jumping from 4.4% to 14.7% in April 2020. A year later, in April 2021, the rate remained at 6.0%, and has hovered at 3.6% since March 2022. However, state unemployment rates varied greatly, as has the time to recovery. Nevada and Hawaii, with their tourism-dependent economies, had the highest annual unemployment rates of 2020 of 13.5% and 12.0%. California's massive employment base experienced a 10.2% annual unemployment rate in 2020, with New York's just behind at 9.9%. This employment upheaval gave a lot of people a push to try remote work. While many of those people moved just a bit further out into the exurbs, many chose to remote work from small towns and rural areas across America.

The US Census Bureau recently released population estimates for municipalities and counties for 2021. Custer County, Colorado, in the Rocky Mountains west of Pueblo, had the fastest growth rate among non-metro counties in the U.S. over the previous year, growing by over 7 percent year-on-year to reach an estimated 5,045 residents in 2021. The county seat of Westcliffe (population 546) is about 7,800 feet in elevation in the Wet Mountain Valley, and is recognized as an International Dark Sky Community. The area has become known as a desirable retirement community, with medical

facilities located a short drive away in Colorado Springs and Denver. However, the growth has also put pressure on utility systems—there's never enough water in the West, and wireline broadband is spotty outside of town.

The thing is, Custer County, along with other amenity-rich small towns and rural areas, were attracting urban refugees well before COVID hit. Mineral County, Colorado, and Mineral County, Montana, both grew at a 6.5% clip—both are located high in the Rocky Mountains and have long histories of boom-and-bust population change.

Bozeman, Montana, grew by 2.7% year on year, but over 1,200 other cities grew at an even faster rate. Jacksonburg, Ohio, grew to 524 residents for the fastest municipal one-year growth rate in the US. Westlake, Florida, more than doubled to 2,182 residents, while Josephine city, Texas also doubled, with 4,565 residents. Jacksonburg is located in the Cincinnati Metro Area, Westlake is in the Miami Metro Area, Josephine is in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metro Area, and all seem to be enjoying more typical suburban/exurban growth than attracting footloose knowledge workers.

On the opposite side of the trend, there was not much of a Zoom boom in resource-dependent small towns and rural areas. Loving County, Texas, saw the largest population contraction in the US, with the US Census Bureau estimating only 57 residents in 2021, to remain the least populated county in the nation. Cameron Parish, on the gulf coast of Louisiana, was estimated to have lost 9.6% of its population year-on-year with 5,080 residents in 2021. The Bakken oil boom has also gone bust, with the US Census Bureau estimating losses of 5% and 6% for Williams County and McKenzie County, North Dakota, once among the fastest growing communities in the nation.

The Zoom town phenomenon seems to have accelerated economic and population trends that were in motion before COVID hit. Now that many offices are going back to in-person work—or cycling between in-person and work-from-anywhere—we'll have to wait to see if the US Census counts a Pandemic Zoom Boom or Bust in small town and rural America.

Rural Transit Opportunities

The National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT) provides small-urban, rural, and tribal transit agencies with practical resources for replicable technological solutions and innovations. N-CATT has two open technical assistance activities with tight timelines:

RFA: Technology Summits

The N-CATT has an opportunity for up to three direct recipients (state Departments of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Rural Planning Organizations, Tribal consortiums, or others) to hold Technology Summits with their small-urban, rural, and tribal agencies. This is an opportunity for agencies across the applicant's geography to bring in challenges they face and use those to work with their peers to collaborate on technology priorities and begin mapping out tech investments at the state level.

Please submit your application in one document in PDF format to moreno@ctaa.org no later than 11:59p.m. EDT, on July 12, 2022.

In 2020 and 2022, N-CATT partnered with state departments of transportation (DOTs) in Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, and New Mexico to host State Technology Summits ("State Summits") for small-urban, rural, and tribal transit operators in those states. Each State Summit provided an organized forum for attendees to identify state-level priorities for technology investments.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Summits occurred virtually. This created an opportunity for N-CATT to develop resources that other DOTs, MPOs, or other transit-oriented organizations can adapt to their own needs.

RFA: Strategic Technology Technical Assistance Teams (STTATs)

The N-CATT is also accepting applications for transit agencies to receive one-on-one technical assistance through the Center's Strategic Technology Technical Assistance Teams (STTATs). N-CATT will work with up to three transportation providers to navigate a technology challenge or



opportunity that results in a useful starting product for the agency, such as an implementation plan or ready-to-go technology solicitation.

Please submit your application in one document in PDF format to moreno@ctaa.org no later than 11:59p.m. EDT, on July 12, 2022.

The Strategic Technology Technical Assistance Teams have already been implemented in communities across the country. For example, The Community Connector in Bangor, Maine was selected to receive N-CATT's technical assistance package in 2021 to identify technology specifications for an upcoming software procurement. Their general manager sought to find a new Intelligent Transportation Software (ITS) to upgrade and automate different transit operations. The three-phase project resulted in a request for proposals (RFP) for Community Connector to procure a comprehensive ITS package that meets agency needs.

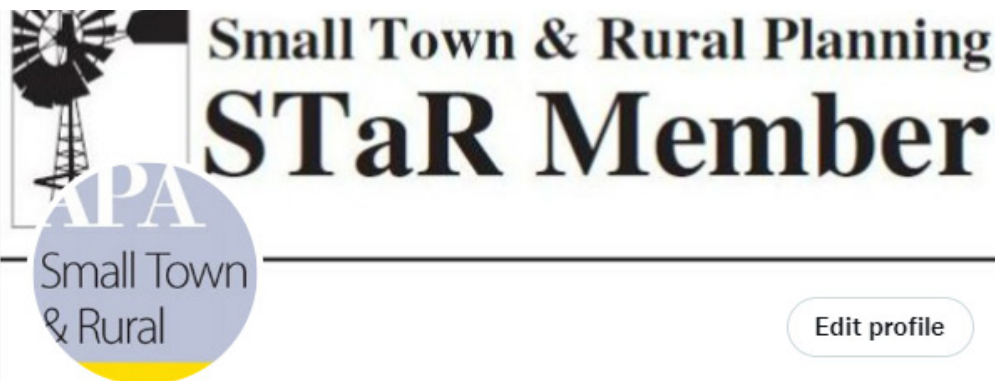
The East Central Iowa Council of Governments sought to address coordination between public transportation providers in their jurisdiction. While operators primarily use the same scheduling and dispatch software, there are operational challenges to cross-county travel, which is necessary to access regional healthcare centers, higher education, and job opportunities. In partnership with technical experts, N-CATT's strike team conducted site visits and interviews to investigate possible solutions for improving coordination among operators. The final product was an alternatives analysis with guidance on moving forward on a consensus-based solution.

For more information on these programs, N-CATT's Tech University, events, and transportation technology news, check out N-CATT's website at <https://n-catt.org/>.

STaR Gets Social (Media, that is!) *Selections from our Twitter feed*

The American Planning Association and APA STaR maintain a presence across social media to bring you the latest and greatest news and information throughout the year.

Check out our [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) groups, and our [Twitter feed](#) @APA_SmallTown, for timely updates between editions.



APA STaR

@APA_SmallTown

American Planning Association Small Town & Rural Planning Division.

#SmallTownRural [planning.org/divisions/small...](https://planning.org/divisions/smalltownrural/) Joined January 2013

1,235 Following 1,788 Followers

Tweets Tweets & replies Media Likes

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Joel Albizo @JoelAlbizo · Jul 1

Congratulations to the newly established @APA_Planning Tribal and Indigenous Planning Division. We're proud to welcome this important community to our family of 24 groups covering a wide range of #planning specialties and interests. #inclusion #diversity

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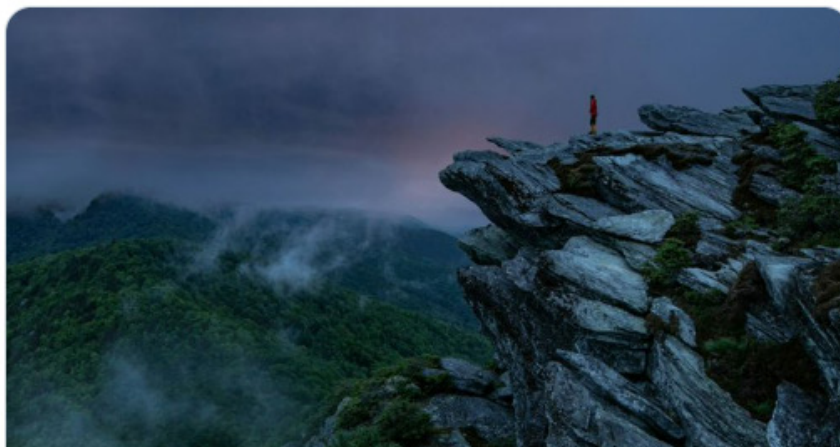
USDA Forest Service @forestservice · 1h

"There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs." — Ansel Adams

Enter @NationalForests annual photo contest July 11-17. This year's theme is "See Your Somewhere." [nationalforests.org/get-involved/n...](https://nationalforests.org/get-involved/national-forests-photo-contest/) Mallory Fountain, Standing on the edge of the world, #Pisgah



Ranch country, central Montana
Photo courtesy of Char Shepard



STaR News Ten Years On: 2012

What were STaR Division planners talking about in the Small Town & Rural Planning News ten years ago?

The cover story of the March 2012 edition featured Rodney C. Nanney's take on the "Nine Golden Rules of Defensible Decision-Making" or "Will we be sued over this?" The nine rules are:

1. Make informed decisions
2. Do not exceed your authority
3. Deliberate in public
4. Ask for advice
5. Document decisions
6. Avoid exclusionary zoning
7. Correct errors immediately
8. Respect Constitutional rights
9. Express your opinions.

Vice Chair-Communications Kevin Fletcher, PhD, put together an 11-page summer edition including stories on:

- Marc Coburn, STaR Internship Grant Recipient, discussed Working & Learning on a new "Gig" as he worked with the City of East Lansing, Michigan, the Lansing Economic Area Partnership, Michigan State University, and others on broadband initiatives. Marc researched case studies and best practices, including zoning ordinances covering utilities, communication towers, and public rights of way;
- Prof. John Poros with the Carl Small Town Center (Mississippi State U) wrote about measuring rural sustainability. "We know that rural areas have different resources and problems than urban areas." CSTC was working to identify indicators for the triple bottom line of economy, equity, and environment as they relate to rural conditions. As usual, they were ahead of their times;

SMALL TOWN & RURAL PLANNING

A Publication of the Small Town And Rural Planning Division of the American Planning Association

June 2012

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Measuring Rural Sustainability—A Research Project, page 8

STaR Programs—Share What You Know, page 10

This electronic newsletter is published four times annually by the APA-STaR Division.

Feature Article

Nine Golden Rules of Defensible Decision-Making by Rodney C. Nanney

The Elephant in the Public Hearing Room

Tell Us:

Do you have a story about public decision-making in your small or rural community. What are the lessons-learned? What things went right... or wrong?

Consider writing your case study down as an article or even shorter column for the STaR Newsletter.

In almost any crowded public meeting on a controversial site plan, special use, rezoning, or other difficult land use issue you will find a proverbial elephant sitting on the backs of the decision-makers at the front of the room. What is this elephant? It is a question: Will we be sued over this?

So, the worst has happened and the answer to this question is "Yes!" A disgruntled applicant has threatened or filed a lawsuit against the town and each of the board or commission members personally. Lawsuits are relatively cheap to file, and it costs even less to make the threat. It is also true that a board member or commissioner may be named as a defendant in land use or development litigation if the individual participated in the decision-making process.

Now before all of our citizen-volunteers dash off to pen their resignation letters, please read on: It is extremely rare that personal liability is imposed in such cases, as it must first be proven that the individual acted maliciously or was grossly negligent. Otherwise, he or she should be dismissed from such cases on the grounds of governmental immunity.

Continued on Page 3

- Chair Chad Nability, AICP expressed concerns with Census data and limitations of the American Community Survey (ACS), and gave an update on a successful program in Los Angeles; and
- Vice Chair-Programs Shai Roos, AICP gave a STaR Programs update in preparation of the 2013 NPC in Chicago.

In case you were wondering, David Birchler, AICP, was our Secretary/Treasurer and Dave Gattis, FAICP, served as Immediate Past Chair. We all still benefit from their volunteer service.

STaR members can review past editions of Small Town and Rural Planning news by logging into the APA website and clicking on the STaR Division webpage to: <https://www.planning.org/divisions/smalltown/newsletter/> .

APA NPC22 — The Aftermath

By Chris Solberg, AICP; ruralresurrection.com

Over 3,000 planning geeks descended on the southern California city for the annual APA National Planning Conference (NPC '22) in late April & early May. The annual COMICON for planning nerds was certainly a success.

APA CEO Joel Albizo and APA Board President Leo R. Asuncion, Jr. welcomed everyone to the event. Asuncion got a laugh from the crowd when he admitted during a question and answer session that the word he used too much was “cannibalize”. But the word is actually apropos for this conference. With so many sessions about zoning reform, to “cannibalize” your zoning ordinance may be the way right term to use.

They kicked off the conference on a good “note”. They brought in Mike Ford (@HipHopArch) the Hip Hop Architect. Mike delivered a great speech about the growing impact of Hip Hop on architecture and planning. He also provided an uplifting discussion about involving younger generations through Hip Hop as well.

San Diego as the Venue

San Diego itself was a great venue for NPC. Though temps were mostly in the upper 60s with very little wind. Which was a great escape from the recently often heavily windswept plains. It was perfect weather for all the mobile workshops that were offered as well.

At the center of it all was the Gaslamp District. Lying conveniently across the street from the San Diego Conference Center, the District is full of shops, bars, and restaurants. It was always an active place, especially during the weekend. Things didn't quiet down until the early morning hours.

Rural Planning at NPC

San Diego itself was a great venue for NPC. Though temps were mostly in the upper 60s with very little wind. Which was a great escape from the recently often heavily windswept plains. It was perfect weather for all the mobile workshops that were offered as well.

Near the top of my list was Chad Nabity's session, “Zoning Reform Won't Solve Small Town Housing Issues”. It was a short, and quick-to-the-point session about housing affordability in rural areas.



Opening Session of the 2022 National Planning Conference

In fact, there was an overwhelming theme throughout the conference about the affordable housing issue. It was a good kick-off to Affordable Housing Month.

I also attended two sessions that involved Donald Elliott of Clarion Associates. He didn't mix words, you knew his stance on the subjects he presented on through his energetic speaking. In “Upzoning for Affordable Housing: Does it Work?” he pressed that the affordable housing issue is simple micro-economics. Supply and demand. There's simply not enough supply to lower demand enough to make a difference in prices.

It seemed to ruffle the feathers of some in the NPC crowd, but it was a completely true statement. While numerous people were concentrating on zoning regulations and subsidies, the roots of the issue is purely supply and demand.

There was also a good session by Emily Goellner of the City of Wayzata, Minnesota. “Transforming Our Lakefront: Wayzata's Story” was a great session about how a town of under 3,700 rejuvenated its waterfront to make a great place to be in downtown Wayzata. I just wished it was longer, as it was only 15 minutes long.

About the Author

Christopher Solberg, AICP, blogs at <http://ruralresurrection.com/>.



planning webcast series

Sponsored by APA Chapters & Divisions

Earn AICP CM credits every year online, at no cost to members of participating APA Divisions and Chapters, including STaR. You can see the current listing of all webcasts at www.ohioplanning.org/planningwebcast.

July 15 – **How Community Heart & Soul Enhances Your Comprehensive Plan** — APA Pennsylvania (CM #9251065) 1.5 CM

Community Heart & Soul is a resident-driven process that engages the entire population of a town in identifying what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it. Developed and field-tested over a decade in partnership with over 100 small cities and towns across America, Community Heart & Soul is a proven process for engaging a community in shaping its future. Learn from three professional planners about the Community Heart & Soul model of planning, community development and community engagement and learn how it has enhanced Comprehensive Plans across the US including in Maine, Washington, Colorado and Pennsylvania.

WEDNESDAY July 20 @1:30 EDT – **Building a National Zoning Atlas: Scaling Transparency & Consistency** — APA Technology Division (CM #9251066) 1.5 CM

Zoning codes, adopted by thousands of local governments across the country, dictate much of what can be built in the United States. While each zoning code can be written slightly differently, they are commonly slight iterations on a similar theme. Planners are quite familiar with the direct and indirect impacts of zoning codes and development regulations can have on housing availability, transportation, education, the food supply, economic opportunity, and access to nature.

Although understanding zoning is critical to good planning, zoning codes are written in ways that make it difficult to communicate in a consistent and transparent way. Cornell University's Legal Constructs Lab is leading an effort to create a national zoning atlas could help us better understand these sometimes-opaque but incredibly influential codes by depicting their key attributes in an online, user-friendly map spanning multiple jurisdictions... This Technology Division sponsored webinar will cover the current status of the project, and provide information with how planners can contribute to this effort.

July 22 – **Ethics in Planning** — APA Ohio (CM #9251068) 1.0 CM ETHICS

Explore recent ethics cases from AICP and test your knowledge of planning ethics and decision-making in a fun, participatory session.

Aug 5 – **Zoning Rules as Code** — APA Technology Division (CM #9251067) 1.5 CM

This webinar will introduce the topic of drafting planning rules as computer code from international case studies.

Aug 12 – **Off the Shelf and Into Action, Creating an Implementable Comprehensive Plan** — APA Pennsylvania Chapter (CM #9251070) 1.5 CM

"The plan wasn't implemented." This is an all-too-common lament about comprehensive plans... This webcast will discuss the "implementable comprehensive plan" approach, affirmative principles and steps communities can employ to create plans elected officials and citizens embrace and partners join in help implement.

Distance Education — On-demand sessions are available annually to view at your convenience. For video recordings of over 300 past webcasts, visit the Planning Webcast Series YouTube Channel at www.youtube.com/planningwebcast.

Member Spotlight: Timothy Smith, FAICP; Sera Architects

Name: Timothy W. Smith,
FAICP, AIA

Professional Position:
Principal, Sera Architects, Port-
land, Oregon.

Education: MCP & M.Arch
- Urban Design, University of
Pennsylvania; BS Architec-
ture & M.Arch, University of
Michigan

APA Involvement: Presenter
at Oregon and National Plan-
ning Confernece, pro bono
wildfire recovery work through
Oregon APA, STaR member.

How did you become inter- ested in planning?

I developed a fascination with cities acquired through growing up in both Detroit and Philadelphia. Through overseas travel – particularly in Europe and North Africa – the interest in cities grew to encompass cities and surrounding regions, particularly small villages and towns.

What's the most interesting project you're working on?

Long range planning and community visioning for Northern California rural communities impacted by the Dixie Wildfire. The project involves working with the community to re-imagine a better, more resilience future and then rebuild to achieve that future.

What is one of your biggest successes?

Working with a major technology company – Google -- and Silicon Valley cities to

re-imagine the tech campus of the future as a mixed-use, transit-oriented campus that welcomes the public into a network of integrated open spaces. Guiding the process to gain entitlements for this transformation that will leave a lasting mark on Silicon Valley communities.

Are you noticing any trends among small towns in your practice?

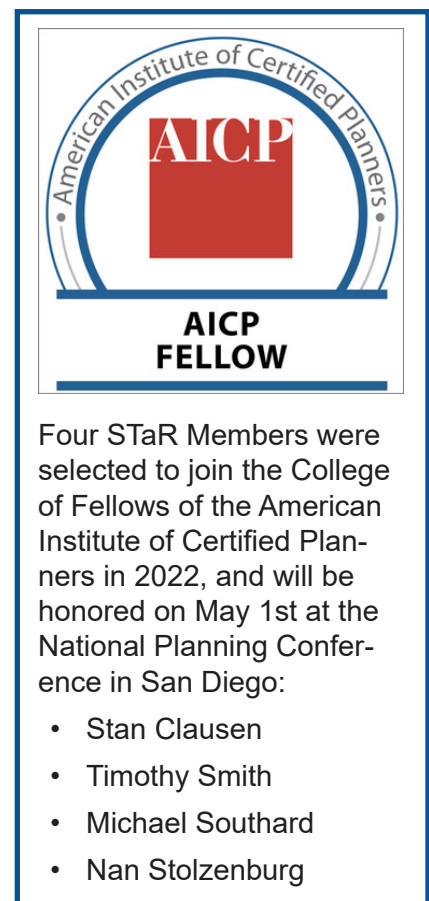
A greater openness to collaborating on climate change and a willingness to bridge the urban-rural divide. A concern over how they can become more resilient in the face of climate, economic, social and public health challenges.

Advice for planners just starting out?

Commit yourself to being a non-siloed practitioner and to be collaborative in your work. The planning and design professions – and the planet -- demand this open attitude to effectively address the complex issues facing our cities, regions and rural areas.

What's the best part of work- ing in small towns & rural areas?

The dedication and passion of the people for their communities. They exhibit a genuine love of place in all they do. Small towns and rural places are often underserved and mostly under-funded but still seem to be able to get practical things done.



Member Spotlight:

Michael Southard, FAICP

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Name: Michael Southard, FAICP

Professional Position: Economic Development Director for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Education: MRCP, University of Oklahoma

APA Involvement: Oklahoma Chapter, OKAPA President 2001-03, AICP Region 3 Commissioner 2004-08, STaR member.

How did you become interested in planning?

A girl who I knew from undergraduate school told me that the world didn't need more lawyers and she told me about planning. She is an attorney in Memphis and I have practiced planning in rural Oklahoma for most of my career. .

How did you get involved in APA?

I first became involved in the profession while in graduate school. I was elected as the student planning president in 1992 and served on the Oklahoma APA Board. Over the next 16 years, I served in ever chapter position and became the first and only Oklahoma planner to be elected to a national planning position.

What's the most interesting project you're working on?

Two projects that I am currently working on include the creation of a rural business credit program using federal funding

from the US Treasury through the State Small Business Credit Initiative.

The second is a project where I am coordinating the evaluations of 8 industrial sites within the reservation. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce used ARPA funds to create a grant program where rural communities will receive up to \$24K to hire a site consultant to assess their industrial site and recommend changes which will improve the site readiness. Eight of my community partners received funding, so my office is working with local leaders to move the process along.

What is one of your biggest successes?

As the community development director, I was called upon to redevelop the business district of Shawnee, OK. We set a course which saw Shawnee pass one of the first "Existing Structures Codes" leading to over \$100M in investments. My office also led the effort to create a downtown streetscape plan, downtown economic development strategy, and the downtown Tax Increment Financing District. I also wrote a TEA-21 grant to construct phase 1 of the streetscape project. Downtown Shawnee has seen tremendous improvement and now how loft residential apartments in the high-rise structures. Little to no investment had been made in 30 years prior to my actions.



How is Small Town & Rural Planning different in your state?

Small town and rural planning in Oklahoma is very similar to that in other southern states. Planning is viewed as a regulatory effort versus visionary and problem solving. In instances where the planner is visionary and an entrepreneurial problem solver, the community excels.

Advice for planners just starting out?

Be honest in your professional opinions. Know your role in the process as the planner (educator, facilitator, convener, advocate, etc.) and know the role of the elected officials (governing body). Many planners burn out and get frustrated because they don't fully understand the distinction.

What's the best part of working in small towns & rural areas?

The best part is in seeing how your influence makes a difference. In larger communities or regions, one may never fully see the impact their actions have. Small and rural areas can have immediate fulfillment.

Economic Development Planning for a Tribal Nation

By Michael Southard, FAICP; Economic Development Director for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is the 3rd largest Native American tribe in the US of which +/- 40,000 reside in the reservation boundary. The reservation is the size of Massachusetts with a population comparable to Buffalo, NY. Nine of Oklahoma's 19 persistent poverty counties are located in the Choctaw Nation. One county had an increase in population from 2010 to 2020. In many aspects, our counties are posterchildren for rural America. These and other demographic and socioeconomic traits or trends make planning and economic development difficult. Successes are far and few between.

Choctaw Nation has assumed a leadership role in the creation of a regional economic development organization. We market the region and work with local leaders to sell their community. Our Regional Profile has won 3 consecutive gold awards from the International Economic Development Council and consecutive Best of Show awards from the Southern Economic Development Council. The Regional Economic Development website (www.GrowChoctaw) won a silver award from IEDC. The Fourth Annual Profile was submitted to IEDC and SEDC for award consideration. Our intent is to provide community leaders with the best possible marketing collateral to sell their community.

Tribal leaders created two funds that give money to local governments: Choctaw Development Fund and the Choctaw Community Partners Fund. The Economic Development Team oversees both funds. The CDF provides small business loans to Choctaw-owned businesses, business relocation incentives, and match funds for federal and state grants. The CDF provides necessary resources to help communities improve themselves. Community partners have used the fund to build a regional sports complex, construct spray parks, carry out a downtown streetscape plan, install fiber into the industrial park, etc. Over \$8M has been given to local programs since 2017. The CCPF is a quarterly

donation presented to communities where the tribe has non-gaming, commercial operations. Community leaders have full discretion as to how the funds are best utilized. Over \$5M has been donated to local governments since 2019.

Tribal leaders recognize that if not for the Choctaw Nation, our distressed communities would have no other opportunity to pull themselves up from poverty.

Michael was granted the honor of membership in the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners in 2022. See his profile, along with fellow STaR member Timothy Smith, FAICP, inside this edition of Small Town & Rural Planning News.

