

Congratulations New York Upstate APA Chapter 2009 Award Winners

Comprehensive Planning

- The Olmsted City - The Buffalo Olmsted Park System Plan for the 21st Century
- Cornell University Comprehensive Campus Master Plan

Planning Excellence Award for *Best Practice*

- Preparing Village "Main Street" for Planning Guidebook
- Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project

Planning Excellence Award for Grassroots Initiative

- Seneca Nation Elder Care Needs Assessment

Planning Excellence Award for Implementation

- Skaneateles Lake Watershed Protection Program

Planning Excellence Award for Innovation in Sustainability

- Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan 2008 Amendment - Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Element

Outstanding Student Project

- Bridging the Gap (A Community Collaborative between D'Youville College & the West Side of Buffalo)

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Black Rock-Riverside Good Neighbors Planning Alliance
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Michael J. Krasner Memorial Scholarship

- Christopher Paul Schaut

Green Design Guidelines: An Opportunity for Smart Growth and Sustainability

By Jayme Breschard

Most municipalities are familiar with design guidelines – descriptive strategies that deal with architectural styles, how buildings are constructed and rehabbed, and how a building relates to its environment. When applied in a consistent fashion, design guidelines can add value to a community and provide guidance for developers. Guidelines can also regulate setbacks, landscaping, and signage. Usually, design guidelines are focused on historic districts, downtown or commercial areas, new residential developments, and sensitive natural environments such as waterfronts. However, there are increasing opportunities for sustainability practices to be applied in design considerations.

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Adirondack Park Profile Completed: Communities Face Quality of Life Challenges

By Tracey M. Clothier, AICP; James M. Martin, AICP; and Greg H. Merriam

The first step to good planning, as we all know, is to understand the community or the region in which we are working. The Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project (APRAP) did just that for the 103 communities that comprise the Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages and the Adirondack North Country Association were the lead sponsors of the Adirondack Regional Assessment Study, and released a project report earlier this year.

As an area recognized for its unique ecological qualities, the park includes diverse communities amid abundant state-owned lands constitutionally

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President's Message

Judy Breselor, AICP

As I end my first year as Chapter President, I want to commend the Chapter Board for their work on behalf of our members. Over the past year, you have seen emails from Tanya Zwahlen pertaining to a variety of chapter issues. In January, we were fortunate to hire Tanya to work with the Board and help fulfill chapter responsibilities. Please be sure that APA national has your correct email address to ensure that you are receiving the notices from Tanya.

As of September 2009, we have 776 members in the Upstate Chapter. This is mid-sized, compared to other chapters. APA has lost members this year, due to the economic climate, but offers significantly reduced membership dues for those who are unemployed or underemployed.

Surprisingly, the number of those registering to take the AICP exam is up. The economy is pushing folks to become more competitive. Our Chapter has been active in offering Certification Maintenance (CM) opportunities at the section and chapter level. Many have participated in webinars and meetings to obtain CM credits. Please log in your credits quickly and keep a record of the sessions you attended.

The Capital District Section hosted the annual chapter conference in Albany. The theme was *Plan 400 – Honoring the Past/Planning for the Future*. Thank you to Sandy Misiewicz and Jackie Hakes for co-chairing this event and to the conference committee who helped to make this conference a great success: Thomas Carey, Sue Caruvana, Katherine Ember, Ross Farrell, Rocco Ferraro, George Homsy, Stephen Iachetta, Marcia Kees, James Levy, Sean Maguire, Kate Maynard, Bruce Raver, Corianne Scally, Jen Viggiani, Monique Wahba, Victoria Zinser, and the student volunteers. Those attending had an opportunity to listen to our keynote speaker, Michelle Wyman, Senior Advisor of ICLEI USA Board speak on Sustainable Communities. Michelle captured the audience as she discussed the many issues planners face. She talked about the challenges of climate change and the many threats that we, as planners, need to address.

Next year our election cycle will reflect our newly adopted bylaws. Elections for officers will be held in



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the summer of 2010. At our annual fall meeting in Buffalo, we will either reinstate or appoint new officers to the Chapter Board. If anyone is interested in serving on the Board, please feel free to contact me at Judith.Breselor@gmail.com regarding your willingness to serve.

We are sending out our newsletter via email, which will save paper and the Chapter's budget. If you are unable to receive this newsletter by email please contact us. 

Call for Articles

The Upstate Planner is interested in hearing about your projects and your thoughts on planning in Upstate New York and around the country. If you recently wrapped up a plan or want to discuss a particular issue, the Upstate Planner is your forum. We can help you shape your ideas and edit your text for publication. Please email your ideas or draft articles to George Homsy at gch24@cornell.edu.

Polluted and Dangerous: New book tracks toxic sites

As a regional planner in Massachusetts, Justin Hollander was intrigued by the polluted sites in cities that most people simply ignored. These sites, he observed, were the worst of the worst and became known as HI-TOADS – High Impact Temporarily Obsolete Abandoned Derelict Sites. These sites, he maintains, severely depress neighborhoods bringing down property values more than a quarter of a mile away. Hollander spoke with the Upstate Planner’s George Homsy about the research that resulted in his new book “Polluted and Dangerous: America’s Worst Abandoned Properties and What Can Be Done About Them.”

UP: What are HI-TOADS?

This term [HI-TOADS] came into being around ten years ago as brownfields were coming into focus. It classifies the worst of the worst brownfields. These sites were so different from other brownfields that planners needed to handle them differently. I wanted to learn about effective strategies for planners and find out how planners were addressing them.

UP: Is it feasible to go after these big expensive sites? Would it be better to use the resources on smaller projects, which could be cleaned up?

Most cities go after the low hanging fruit because they can get a bigger bang for the buck. The problem is that the abandoned steel mill in the corner of town has a huge impact. Those properties bring down whole neighborhoods. They depress property values more than 1/4 of a mile away. Many communities have a big event and announce when they attract five to ten new jobs; instead they should eliminate the polluted site that is a drag on the community.

UP: Are you finding the investments are being returned to the economy?

My impression is not from a basic cost-benefit standpoint. If you put \$2 million into cleaning a site, you are not going to get \$2 million dollars in economic return right away. But we are also talking about public health, quality of life, and the general attractiveness of a community for businesses. If you add everything up, you could make a case for the investment in cleanup.

What I’m trying to get across in the book is that it is not so much about economics. It’s not that someone needs to cut you a check for \$10 million dollars to clean it up. It’s that in shrinking cities, you have to think about maybe putting these HI-TOAD sites into some use. They many not be generating economically for the city, but at least they are not as large a drag on the whole

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Justin Hollander says that polluted sites can be productive parts of communities even if the revitalization does not create jobs or much economic activity.



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Historic district design guidelines typically protect against insensitive new construction and teardowns. Current best practices for historic district design guidelines emphasize educational information, specific guidelines, and illustrations. There are many ways property owners can accomplish practical energy retrofits—including the installation of weather stripping at openings, insulation of attic and crawl spaces, re-caulking exterior joints, and re-glazing loose window panes—before introducing contemporary measures. Changes to a historic building’s exterior can also reinforce green design. Retaining and repairing traditional building materials and features is sustainable. Practices include maintaining old-growth wood, preserving historic masonry walls for their high-insulating value, and protecting wood windows with minimal visual impact and overall energy efficiency by installing storm windows. Illustrations can reinforce the informational text, such as demonstrating how storm windows should not damage or obscure the historic window sash and frame or how to select appropriate color finishes compatible with the existing sash color.

The placement of bus shelters and benches, the design of sidewalks and bike paths, the introduction of landscaping and street trees, and the incorporation of community parks and public gathering spaces all add to the vitality of neighborhoods. Roads constructed in the 1950s and 1960s were designed to move traffic quickly through communities; thereby changing the character of existing neighborhoods. Many were constructed with more capacity than needed. Rather than leaving them underused, green design guidelines can provide guidance on how to serve multiple modes efficiently and aesthetically while providing opportunities for new development. Guidelines can complement roadway retrofits by increasing the attractiveness of public transit, such as neighborhood-scale-sized vehicles with bright colors and themes reflecting the various lines. Advocates of Smart Growth support the connection between streets, buildings, and public spaces to create communities valued for their uniqueness.

The most logical application of green design guidelines is ensuring the protection of natural resources and critical environmental areas with development. Guidelines can reduce the negative visual impact of large, off-street parking areas and address the environmental impacts of noise, glare,



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and heat by incorporating existing trees and introducing planting medians or islands. Low-impact development (LID) is development that results in low impacts on natural resources. Through the use of graphics and pictures, design guidelines can support sustainability practices, such as reducing impervious cover, preserving more open space and green areas, and capturing stormwater on-site by promoting water infiltration and recharge through the use of cisterns, permeable pavers, and rain gardens.

As communities continue to grow, revitalize, and even shrink, green design guidelines offer more opportunities for broad support in the ongoing use of the built and natural environment. The issues are multidimensional. By linking sustainability with the built environment, a forum for meeting shared goals is possible. ©

Breschard is a senior planner with the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council.

Plan 400 – Honoring the Past / Planning the Future 2009 New York Upstate APA Chapter Conference in Albany



Planners from across New York State and the north-eastern region attended 20 sessions and mobile work-shops to learn about cutting edge planning practices and to earn CM credits. *Photo courtesy of Steven Mikulencak.*



Planners hang out in the vault of the Old Home Savings Bank during the conference reception. *Photo courtesy of George Homsy.*



Keynote speaker Michelle Wyman, the former executive director of ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, charged planners to use their positions and knowledge to find ways to create more sustainable communities – most importantly to find ways to deal with global warming. Planners, she said, are in a powerful position to push for change. She gave examples of communities where officials found common ground between protecting the environment and protecting community coffers. *Photo courtesy of Steven Mikulencak.*

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Plan 400 – Honoring the Past / Planning the Future 2009 New York Upstate APA Chapter Conference in Albany



The 2009 conference co-chairs, Sandy Misiewicz and Jackie Hakes, enjoy themselves at the reception held in a historic bank building in downtown Albany. *Photo courtesy of Steven Mikulencak.*



Christopher Schaut (right), a student at the University at Buffalo, receives the Michael J. Krasner Scholarship check from Judy Breselor, Chapter President. *Photo courtesy of Steven Mikulencak.*



At the opening session, planners listen to keynote speaker Michelle Wyman talk about the responsibility planners have in mitigating and preparing for climate change. *Photo courtesy of Steven Mikulencak.*

Check out more pictures from the 2009 chapter conference in Albany, download presentation materials from the workshops, and see pictures and programs from past conferences at www.planningconference.org.

UB Planning Graduate Students Visit Germany to Inform Their Upcoming Work for the Town of Amherst

By Jessie Hersher

This semester, the University at Buffalo's Urban and Regional Planning Department Masters Program (UB MUP) will be researching potential policy, program, and physical infrastructure recommendations to promote active living among children in Amherst, New York. In an effort to do this, 12 MUP students from UB travelled to Stuttgart, Germany, to observe how German children commute to school, how they interact with their built environment, and what programs are in place to increase their safety. Led by Professors Samina Raja and Niraj Verma, the graduate students traveled throughout the Stuttgart region to observe and study the different approaches to planning for youth and active living.

Stuttgart is the capital of a bustling German state with over 590,000 residents and is a very dense city. While Stuttgart and Amherst are not parallel cities, there are still many lessons to be learned. We were able to observe adventure playgrounds, a well-designed park system that linked large portions of the city, and a mandatory bicycle safety training for local youth.

We visited different schools and communities where we held meetings with planners, teachers and students to discuss issues pertaining to physical activity, transportation and safety. We discussed public policies, community attitudes, and built environment attributes that affect active lifestyles for children.

Our discussions with the children were very enlightening. The culture of active living is second nature to the children. They were baffled by our questions—why were we asking them if they walked to school? Didn't everyone walk to school?

Our observations in Stuttgart became a catalyst for innovative thinking about how urban tools, policies, and programs could be applied to match the needs of

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The Stuttgart Police set up a bicycle safety course for children at the city's Bike Days, a festival to educate the residents and share information and resources for biking in the city. *Photo courtesy of Derek Nichols.*



UB MUP students visit different communities in Germany. *Photo courtesy of Derek Nichols.*

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Amherst and other American cities.

What we can do is apply the best practices from Stuttgart to help inform our recommendations for Amherst. Observing the city of Stuttgart added to our knowledge base, which can lead to new planning ideas and a change in planning priorities.

Our work will focus on some of the current planning priorities in the United States, specifically, increasing the physical activity of today's youth. We will partner with the Town of Amherst to study how we can encourage children to walk or bike to and from school. We will look at precedents, both domestically and internationally, that show how other communities are approaching the same questions. We will look at programs that encourage physical activity and have proven results. Finally, we will look at successful community designs that help to facilitate safe routes to schools for today's youth.

Our intended product will be recommendations to the Town of Amherst on policy, program, and/or infrastructure changes that can lead to a more active lifestyle for its youth population. The final report will be available at the end of the fall 2009 semester. ©

Hersher is a California native and a second year MUP student at the University of Buffalo.



German signage for a pedestrian only zone.
Photo courtesy of Derek Nichols.

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Polluted and Dangerous, continued from page 3

community. In Flint, Michigan, for example, they are returning parts of the city to nature. They realize that a HI-TOAD site does not need to go back to mills or manufacturing, but it can be attractive in other ways that benefit a neighborhood.

UP: Is it a problem when cities tackle these from an economic development perspective rather than a broader planning perspective?

HI-TOADs are a neighborhood problem. Community process is essential. It's frustrating to learn that the Economic Development Director doesn't know about community engagement or how to think about neighborhood-wide issues. Sometimes they specifically didn't want to engage local residents. Economic development people can be narrowly focused on selling a site for the most amount of money or creating a certain number of jobs. That's sometimes useful. But if a site has been idle for 20 years, you need a planner or an economic developer who can look at the problem more broadly.

UP: Talk about a successful plan for a HI-TOAD.

The chapter in my book on Trenton talks about a new greenway plan. It was in an industrial part of town that suffered a lot of disinvestment over the decades. It was an entirely industrial district that hadn't seen activity in 50 years and the land had many different owners.

The city obtained funds to create a plan. They went in, engaged the community, and came up with a vision and a master plan. The plan was to create a park or really to enlarge an existing nearby park. Over time, as properties go into foreclosure, the city goes in, tears down the building, and landscapes the area. It's a long-term plan to create a park which will occur over 30 years. But it is a model for HI-TOAD reuse.

UP: Do you find resistance because people want to bring economic activity back to the sites?

Yes, a lot of resistance. But it comes from more than local officials. A lot of it is from the state and federal governments that may require job creation be a part of projects funded with their grant monies. The problem is that if the grants require job creation, they are limited as to what you can do. In some places, at some times, passive use of the

property could be better than trying to create jobs.

There needs to be leadership so that communities realize there is no economic use coming back to many of these places. A study by Hank Mayer found that it took a generation for people to not look at a particular place the way it was and for them to give up trying to bring economic development back. So perhaps after 30 or 40 years, people can start to think about putting in artists lofts or simply cold storage that does not create many, if any, jobs. Maybe you won't create any jobs, but you can control the significant drag that these highly polluted sites have on the community. ©

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protected as “forever wild.” The report, along with its appendices, will provide a factual basis for ensuing discussion on Adirondack Park issues and planning at both the local and regional levels. It details community life, government operations, land use, infrastructure, emergency services, education, and the demographics of each community in reference to the Adirondack Park.

Funding was secured through the New York State Department of State Quality Communities Grant Program. The Siena Research Institute, the Center for Government Research, and the Technical Assistance Center of SUNY-Plattsburgh aided in the study, along with numerous county, state and, federal agencies.

Findings: Unique Place – Distinct Challenges

The study found a number of trends that demonstrate how different Adirondack Park communities are from the rest of New York State, even other rural areas. It also documents that while two-thirds of all state-owned lands in New York are in the Adirondack Park, nearly all are concentrated in fewer than half of the Park’s municipalities. Additionally, about 40% of the residential properties within the Blue Line are owned by individuals who live outside the Park, constituting half of the total residential property value of the Park.

The results affirm how Adirondack communities share a challenge in providing services for their residents and visitors, while simultaneously serving as gateways to the park’s public lands. Significant findings from the assessment include the following:

- The Adirondack Park includes one-fifth of New York’s land area, and holds less than one percent of the state’s total population.
- Two-thirds of all state-owned lands in New York State are in the Adirondack Park.
- Ninety percent of the Adirondack Forest Preserve is located in 40 percent of the towns.
- The Office of Real Property Services lists 76 percent of the Adirondacks as “Wild, Forested, Conservation Lands and Public Parks.”
- Individuals with mailing addresses outside the park own about 40 percent of residential parcels, which constitute half of the total residential property value.
- The economy is highly dependent on correctional services. One of every 26 people living in the Adirondack Park resides in a correctional facility.
- Only seven communities have complete cell phone coverage.
- Park residents average just less than 43 years of age. By 2020, only the west coast of Florida will exceed the Adirondacks as the oldest region in America.
- School enrollments in the park have decreased by 329 students annually throughout the current decade, which is equivalent to the loss of one average size Adirondack school district every 19 months.

- The Saranac Lake School District (1,536 students) covers an area nearly the size of Suffolk County (69 districts and 254,629 students).

- From 1970 to 2007, the number of teachers in Adirondack school districts increased by 34 percent, while the student population dropped by 31 percent.

Mines, mills, and other traditional industries in the park are largely shuttered. The park-wide loss of private

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Adirondack School Districts Adapt

In light of diminishing enrollment, school districts have recognized the need for creative approaches to remain viable. Peter J. Hallock, Superintendent for the Piseco Common School District and the Raquette Lake Union Free School District, provided case studies of districts that are effectively addressing declining enrollment. The case study for the Hadley-Luzerne Central School District was provided by the Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Program (APRAP).

The **Raquette Lake Union Free School District** has suffered an approximate 90% decline in their enrollment over the past three decades. Rather than consolidate with another district, it has chosen to become a non-instructional district and to send all of their students to neighboring districts. The former building is used as a community center, complete with a fitness facility, history center and offices for regional organizations. It also houses educational and recreational opportunities for area residents.

Facing steep enrollment declines, the **Piseco Common School District** made fundamental changes to its operations. Still home to the elementary school, the building, renamed *The Adirondack Community Education Center*, houses the Cornell Cooperative Extension, library, community technology center, fitness facility, and education center. The success of the new direction is reflected by strong voter support.

The **Keene Central School District** tackled the issue of declining population with a strategic plan that focuses on increasing enrollment. The plan includes measures such as promoting the district to families considering moving to the Adirondacks and enticing non-resident parents to send their children to the district for a distinctive educational program. Their academics include a strong focus on the local environment and the Adirondack region.

The **Newcomb Central School District** lost 85% of its student body over the past two decades. It reached out around the world and gained attention with plans to become an increasingly prominent destination for foreign students. Currently, nearly one quarter of the high school student body is comprised of foreign students from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America, who pay tuition to attend the school.

The **Hadley-Luzerne School District** is seeking ways to reduce its transportation budget. The district is considering lengthening each day by 40 minutes and closing school every other Friday. This will save \$200,000 annually in heating costs, bus fuel and substitute teachers. The extra time in the classrooms also will increase instruction time. Potential drawbacks include childcare issues for working parents and scheduling for after-school programming.

Michael S. Batcher, MS, AICP Ecologist and Environmental Planner

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Adirondack Park Profile, continued from page 10

sector jobs has been offset temporarily by increases in public health care, education, and government employment. Still, there has been out-migration of young families and an in-migration of semi-retired and retired persons. And the sparse population has contributed to a lag in private sector investment of broadband communication and data transfer infrastructure.

The study also found that schools in the Adirondack Park serve as the core of local employment and represent the center of community life. Many advantages related to being a district in the Adirondack Park are highlighted in the responses to the community survey, including a strong degree of community pride, small classes that offer more student-teacher interaction, and recruitment and retention of talented staff. In many ways these school systems embody the model for the small rural school district. Districts have spent many years adapting to changing socio-economic conditions and some have had to completely reinvent themselves to remain operational.

Over the past 40 years, however, enrollment in Adirondack school districts has declined at a significantly greater pace than other upstate New York schools. The typical Adirondack school has a 10:1 student/teacher ratio, both enviable and expensive. The cost per student in the park is more than twice the statewide average. Declining enrollments, unfunded state mandates, and excessive transportation costs provide a backdrop for some unusual adaptive measures taken by several of these school districts. Case studies for the Raquette Lake,

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Piseco, Keene, Newcomb and Hadley-Luzerne districts appear in the accompanying box to highlight the creative measures some districts have undertaken to remain viable.

Implications for the Park

The obvious need to merge long-term economic revitalization with environmental protection must occur for the towns and villages within the Adirondack Park. Bold new strategies and investment will be required to address the complex needs of communities within a protected landscape. Such strategies must support sustainable development of communities consistent with both quality of life and environmental stewardship. The data presented assesses the need for targeted and timely utilization of resources to address the questions listed above and to drive the planning process to meet the fundamental needs of the people of the Adirondack Park.

The study provides essential information for the discussion of the following issues:

- How to provide quality employment in places that have suitable development opportunities inside the Blue Line?
- What is the effect of continued state land acquisitions, the use of easements, and private land use regulations on the social fabric and economy of park communities? 

Clothier, Martin and Merriman are all planners with the LA Group, PC, based in Saratoga Springs. Copies of the report are available on the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages website: www.aatvny.org.

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