Suburban Futures, Sense of Place, & Ethics
A Report on the 2014 MD/DE APA Conference

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The Delaware - Maryland Regional APA Conference was held in Newark, Delaware, on October 29 and 30, 2014. The theme of the conference was “Planning for Healthy and Sustainable Places.”

I participated in the design workshop by June Williamson, RA, LEED, Assistant Professor of Architecture at Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, The City College of New York and Fern Liew, graduate student in the Master of Landscape Architecture program of the same department. Dr. Williamson and Ms. Liew led the attendees to redesign or retrofit suburban places. Dr. Williamson lectured on the origins and influential movements in the development of suburbia and the current movement to cities – whether we are “sprawled out or just a pause.” The lecture concluded with a presentation on the urban design strategies and tactics that Dr. Williamson recommended in her book, Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb. The workshop participants then divided up into teams to retrofit suburban forms using strategies such as reuse of buildings, environmental restoration, resizing blocks for walkability, making connections among uses, quality architecture, and “real” streets.

My team was assigned to redesign an underutilized office park using the techniques that Dr. Williamson presented in her lecture and in her book.

At lunch, William Anderson, FAICP, President of APA who is also the coauthor of Sustaining Places: The Role of the Comprehensive Plan, was the keynote speaker. Mr. Anderson emphasized the importance of scale in planning. Specifically, he referenced the use of regional plans, master and/or community plans, and site specific plans. Mr. Anderson drew on his experience as Director of Planning in San Diego, California, to elaborate on the significance of a place and its history to meet the challenges of planning. Mr. Anderson spoke to the increasing urbanization of the U.S. and the world and discussed the value of social equity, access to quality jobs, services to an aging population, and inclusiveness.
After the long cold winter we are all ready for the promises of Spring! And there are lots of new things happening within APA and Maryland. By now, we all know that David Craig has been appointed as the Maryland Secretary of Planning. Secretary Craig brings a wealth of experience as an elected executive responsible for planning at the city and county level as well as experience as a state senator. His selection brought more media attention to the Maryland Department of Planning than it has ever had before. This is an opportunity for the department and for the profession. Welcome Mr. Secretary!

More changes in planning leadership across the state are beginning to take shape. Several new planning directors have been named at the county and municipal level. If you have not already met the new planning leadership in your county or municipality – make a point of doing so before the end of April.

Speaking of April brings to mind the National Planning Conference in Seattle. A number of Marylanders are already registered and there is still time for you to join us! It promises to be a great conference and I hope to see you there!

We also have several bits of important chapter business to discuss. You may recall that I sent out a list of proposed changes to the Chapter Bylaws in December. Many thanks to those who responded to the call for comments. The Executive Committee completed their review and has finalized a proposed revised set of bylaws for your consideration. Please review the draft that you receive this month and respond with any comments or concerns you may have. We will hold a special meeting for all chapter members on April 15 at the Engineers Club to hold the formal vote on the proposal. Please plan to join us for a chance to meet with fellow planners and to take care of this important bit of chapter business.

The Strategic Plan Committee has distributed the 2015 Members Survey as part of the ongoing effort to better serve the Chapter. Please submit your response by March 12.

And finally, it is time to prepare for the election of officers. This year the Chapter will hold our elections in conjunction with the election of national officers. Elections are going to be held in August and the results will be available in September, well in advance of the Annual Meeting.

The chapter Nominations Committee, Jim Noonan (chair), Pat Keller and Aviva Brown, are looking for members willing to take on leadership roles for the next two-year term. Please consider running for office and serving the chapter. There is no better way to get to know your fellow planners from across the state.

Jackie Seneschal
President, APA Maryland Chapter

services to an aging population, and inclusiveness.

I attended the “Innovative GIS and Census Data Applications for Community and Recreation Planning” session by Noemi Mendez; Information Service Specialist with U.S. Census Bureau, Michael Krumrine; GIS Coordinator with Delaware State Parks, and Jason Sealy; Account execute with ESRI. At this session, I was most interested in learning about the functional methodology that Delaware used for determining park usage goals and ways to increase access.

I also chose to attend the “Ethics Skit” session by Delaware Chapter, and the discussion afterward was a reminder of the challenges that professional planners deal with when aspiring to reach the high standards of our profession in light of the changing nature of planning. Several attendees expressed concern that the ethics standards do not adequately address the role of planning practitioners in the private sector.
Fiscal constraints in regional transportation planning, while challenging, mean that the development of future long-range plans includes innovative thinking for sustainable projects.

This is the case in the Baltimore region, where the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (“BRTB”), the metropolitan planning organization (“MPO”) for the Baltimore metropolitan region, works to make sure that any investments in the next long-range transportation plan for the region will be put to the most effective use.

Consistent with the requirements of the current authorization of the federal surface transportation law, the Baltimore region is developing its next long-range transportation plan, Maximize2040: A Performance-Based Transportation Plan. The law, known as Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (“MAP-21”), emphasizes monitoring and assessing the performance of transportation systems. In a period of funding uncertainty, this approach makes sense.

The name Maximize2040 conveys the importance of getting the best out of transportation systems and resources. The plan will cover the 21-year period from 2020-2040. BRTB, the policy and decision making body for federal transportation funding, expects to adopt Maximize2040 in November 2015.

Development of Maximize2040 started in late 2013. At that time, BRTB asked its advisory groups for input on the goals and strategies from the current regional plan, Plan It 2035. Engagement and discussion with these groups took several months, resulting in recommendations for further conversations with the public. At this point in the input process, BRTB launched the plan in early April 2014 seeking public comments. Based on recommendations from the advisory groups and the public, BRTB adopted nine broad goals and supporting strategies to guide the allocation of federal funds and the monitoring of system performance. The goals and their supporting strategies address system safety and security, system maintenance, accessibility and mobility, environmental conservation, transportation’s role in economic growth, regional cooperation, and informed decision making.

In June 2014, Maximize2040 reached another development milestone when BRTB adopted year 2040 population and employment forecasts generated by representatives of local jurisdictions. These forecasts play an important part in the region’s travel demand model. This model predicts where and how people will travel in the region, given the concentrations of households, jobs, and the locations of major transportation projects.

Other important input for Maximize2040 includes:

- Forecasts of expected revenue available to the region for the 2020 through 2040 period
- The criteria used to evaluate and score major candidate projects for the plan
- The performance measures and targets the region will use to monitor system performance and progress toward meeting regional goals

The Maryland Department of Transportation (“MDOT”) develops the revenue forecasts in consultation with BRTB. BRTB adopted these forecasts in October 2014. In November 2014, BRTB approved evaluation criteria and scoring methodologies consistent with MAP-21 requirements and regional goals. BRTB accepted performance measures and targets in December 2014. All of this input helps to inform decision-making with respect to investments in major projects and programs during the next 25 years.

Another important input into this decision-making process are the findings from a scenario planning exercise BRTB conducted from June through December 2014. In June and July, BRTB solicited public input on future forces and trends that could significantly affect the region’s transportation systems and economic competitiveness over the next 25 years.

Continued on page 4
A focus group of representatives from local jurisdictions, the environmental community, MDOT, and a local university met to discuss these trends, and provide additional focus on the public’s input. This focus group recommended that BRTB look at scenarios addressing changing employment, residential, and travel trends; the potential effects of climate change; and the implications of advances in transportation technology.

BRTB held two scenario workshops, one in September and one in December of 2014, to discuss the effects of these scenarios on future conditions in the region. Workshop participants also recommended investment approaches BRTB could apply to best meet the challenges of these potential future conditions. Representatives from MDOT’s modal agencies, local jurisdictions, local universities, environmental and public health groups, emergency management groups, workforce development organizations, economic development organizations, private transportation providers, engineering and planning consultants, and BRTB’s Public Advisory Committee participated in these workshops.

Another significant element of plan development was the solicitation of ideas from the general public. From September to December 2014, BRTB asked for public new ideas for major projects and programs for inclusion in Maximize2040. This process generated more than 900 ideas from the public. BRTB will receive a report of all of the submitted ideas in early 2015 and forward those ideas to local governments and appropriate state agencies as they develop the lists of candidate projects for Maximize2040.

Going forward, all of the aforementioned input will inform the process of developing and submitting candidate projects from MDOT and local jurisdictions. The collection of these projects will take place from January through March 2015. Technical professionals of Baltimore Metropolitan Council (“BMC”) staff to BRTB will score these projects based on the evaluation criteria adopted by BRTB. They will then generate a preliminary list of projects that score well according to the criteria. BRTB will evaluate these projects and their estimated costs against the forecasts of expected revenues. In other words, how many worthy projects can the region expect to implement, given regional priorities and forecasted revenues?

This process will generate a “Preferred Alternative,” with estimated costs for system operations, routine system maintenance (including transit vehicle maintenance and replacement), and major capacity-increasing projects and programs. Technical staff will test the effects of this Preferred Alternative using the travel demand model. Another critical element of the testing process is determining the effects of the Preferred Alternative on the region’s ability to conform to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) air quality standards and the associated air quality goals in the State Implementation Plan. Technical staff will also analyze the effects of the Preferred Alternative on vulnerable population (low-income, minority, and zero-car). Zero-car people or zero-car households in the vulnerable population include people who; (1) cannot afford to own a car because of low income, and; (2) can no longer drive because of age or disability.

Once technical staff examines these effects, BRTB will release a draft long range plan including information about the various inputs, expected revenues, and the Preferred Alternative—for public review and comment. The public release of the plan will take place during Spring 2015. Following this public engagement process, BRTB will modify the draft plan and develop a final plan during Summer 2015. This final plan will be available for further public review and comment.

The anticipated adoption date for the final plan is November 2015. Following adoption of the final plan, BRTB will submit the plan to the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration for approval. The final step will be the U.S. EPA’s acceptance of the finding of air quality conformity for the approved plan.
Opportunities Abound for Infill and Reinvestment in Maryland

David T. Whitaker, AICP, Maryland Department of Planning

*Sustainable Growth Commission Report Recommends Ways to Advance Community Revitalization*

Planning professionals know from experience that mixed use, walkable environments provide multiple benefits. The benefits may include reducing the need to drive, facilitating healthier lifestyles, lowering transportation costs, fostering strong communities, creating financially beneficial synergies between residents and local businesses, and driving the innovation economy.

How to encourage and incentivize these types of infill and revitalization projects is the subject of a recent report prepared by the Maryland Department of Planning staff to the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission.

*Reinvest Maryland: Accelerating Infill Redevelopment & Community Revitalization* provides dozens of recommendations on advanced quality infill and redevelopment and community revitalization. Many of its recommendations address market, financial, regulatory, and policy barriers and are intended to strengthen reinvestment, infill, redevelopment, and transit oriented development (TOD). The report also includes a recommendation to achieve more functional and attractive design, create more equitable communities, and establish metrics to gauge success and provide accountability to investors, residents, and government.

*Reinvest Maryland* examines current efforts and identifies where existing Maryland programs have worked well, how they might be improved, and how to address gaps in order to more effectively target resources. It also offers profiles of successful infill and redevelopment projects and programs across the state and nationally. *Reinvest Maryland* presents ideas and examples for state and local governments to coordinate and strengthen efforts and to fully engage the private sector to promote infill, redevelopment, and revitalization.

Strengthening Maryland’s commitment to its towns, cities, and suburban centers is timely. Many studies have documented the preference of Millennials for walkable, connected communities with transportation options. “For millennials especially, ‘quality of life’ increasingly means proximity to urban amenities such as restaurants, retail, cultural, and social venues,” according to Bruce Katz and Julie Wagner of the Brookings Institution, quoted in the New York Times.

Despite many compelling economic and environmental reasons and the presence of growing markets, reinvestment is often difficult to achieve. Financial, regulatory, and policy barriers often make redevelopment more challenging than greenfield development. The report identifies strategies to address barriers that impede infill and redevelopment.

Successful projects highlighted in the report include downtown street and façade improvements, residential rehabilitation, residential infill, mixed-use and TOD projects, and improvements to parks and public spaces. Other best practices include zoning, innovative financing, and business incubators.

The recommendations reflect extensive outreach to stakeholders throughout the state including interviews or meetings with planners, practitioners, economic development professionals, elected officials, representatives from transit, housing, community, small businesses, environmental and historic preservation organizations, builders, developers, the Maryland Municipal League, Maryland Association of Counties and national experts on infill and redevelopment. The report also incorporated inputs from a wide range of stakeholders as part of the Partnership for Building Reuse, a project of the Urban Land Institute and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

*Continued on page 6*
Demand for infill and walkable communities is up, and demand for automobile-dependent development projects, relatively speaking, is down. Many factors have contributed to this trend. Miles driven by Americans aged 16 through 34 dropped 40 percent per capita over the last decade when compared to the same age group in the previous decade. To address their needs for housing and employment opportunities, it is important to examine the potential of infill, reinvestment, and revitalization of Maryland communities.

Communities and investors that work collaboratively to identify places to target growth and revitalization, as well as resource conservation, will have more success in using scarce resources to support growth as well as meeting the growing demand for compact, walkable places. This report outlines strategies that can reinforce targeted growth and revitalization, designate resource conservation areas, support Maryland’s planning goals, and provide signals to the private sector where it makes sense to invest and build.

Film in Maryland Event

James Palma, AICP, Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development

On August 20, 2014, 24 people gathered at the Engineer’s Club in Baltimore to attend Film in Maryland, a discussion about the effect of the film industry across the State. The speakers at the event were Jack Gerbes, the Director of the Maryland Film Office (an office within the State’s Department of Business and Economic Development), and Debbie Dorsey, Director, of the Baltimore Film Office, part of the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts.

The event opened with a “movie night” of clips from various movies and television shows that have been produced in Maryland. The clip reel included movies and TV shows such as House of Cards, the Blair Witch Project, the costume drama Washington Square, and the drama Ladder 49. The film clips illustrated the many different types of productions that have been filmed throughout all areas of the State.

After the showing, Jack Gerbes and Debbie Dorsey discussed the film industry and how it interacts with local and State governments. Both Baltimore City and the State film office have longstanding ties to the film industry, and Maryland has successfully attracted both film and television productions for many years. Much of this activity occurs within the City of Baltimore, but there have been productions in most regions of the State.

Both speakers noted when productions come to an area, how, they often invested in physical improvements to neighborhoods that supported their productions. The improvement that the film production brought in would remain in place after the production is completed. One example is the improvements to the historic Union Square Park in support of the movie Washington Square, while another is the refurbishment of the historic Engine 33 firehouse for the movie Ladder 49.

When asked what local governments can do to attract film productions, the speakers brought up the example of Ocean City and Ping Pong Summer. To assist with that film’s production costs, Ocean City voted to give the production a $100,000 grant, and Worcester County matched this with its own $100,000 grant. The grants were awarded in support of Ocean City’s tourism industry, which was expected to benefit from the City’s prominent featuring as a tourist destination in the film. However, it is rare for a local government to directly grant funds to film productions. The largest counties in Maryland have their own film offices, but local governments all depend on the State’s Tax Film Production Activity Tax Credit and Sales Tax Exemption programs for production support.

Continued on page 7
The presenters discussed some of the support that the speakers’ offices offer, such as maintaining databases of potential filming locations across the State that can be searched using an online interface. The Maryland Film Office also maintains lists of skilled crew members and companies that have experience working in film and television productions that are available by potential productions.

Finally, there were conversations about the economic impact of the film and television industry in Maryland. Both speakers discussed how the film industry supported local businesses and trades, either directly through film-related firms or indirectly through catering services, set construction, and security services. When asked about tax credits and their effect on the industry, both speakers pointed out the competitive nature of the film industry, and how areas without incentives generally lose out to areas with them.

Mentor Match at Delaware/Maryland Regional Planning Conference

Lauren Good, AICP, Anne Arundel County Office of Planning and Zoning

The American Planning Association (“APA”) has recognized that demographic shifts are occurring in the planning profession and that there is a need to reach out to the next generation of planning professionals in order to develop the future leaders of the profession and of APA. As one step in accomplishing this outreach, APA has been encouraging local chapters to design mentoring programs and integrate them into their conferences.

During 2014 Regional Conference, the Maryland and Delaware Chapters partnered to present the first Mentor Match program. The session was advertised through both Chapters’ listservs, social media accounts, and conference announcements. Experienced professionals as well as emerging planners were encouraged to participate in the program. Participants filled out a short survey prior to the conference so that they could be matched to someone who might have similar interests.

On the first day of the conference, our participants met in the casual setting of the conference center’s atrium. Approximately 16 participants sat and introduced themselves. They were undergraduate students, graduate students, recent graduates, new planners, planning professionals recently relocated to Maryland, and experience planning practitioners. The participants were from a diverse professional background, including transportation planners, comprehensive planners, public sector planners, civil engineers, and architects. They were from municipalities, counties, and private sectors.

The students and emerging planners asked a variety of questions regarding planning education and profession. The questions were centered on the course selections, pros and cons of being a planner, skill sets needed in performing the planning job, interaction with other people, and a typical day of a planner.

Experienced participants responded to those questions with words of wisdom. Stories were shared. Some were serious. Some got a few laughs. To my perspective, the most important thing that planners tried to impress upon our newest colleagues is that the field is really what you make of it. A planner can specialize in one small area or be involved in a comprehensive manner, ranging from demographic analysis to plan review, GIS, floodplain management, transportation, comprehensive plan writing, and other planning functions. Planning is a field where a planner can never stop learning: there’s always a chance for dialogue with a coworker, acquiring a new skill at a workshop, or reading about how another community is tackling a similar issue in other areas of the country or world and applying the same principles locally.

After a brief question and answer session, the mentor match pairs could decide whether they wanted to continue mentoring by having lunch together or attending conference sessions together. Overall, feedback from participants was positive. Many of the questions were raised by undergraduate or graduate students. This motivated the mentor matching organizers to create great ideas for the program moving forward. This was a fantastic start for what will hopefully become a welcome staple at upcoming local conferences, which will be beneficial to both our emerging and experienced professionals.
Inter-dependent Large Landscapes

A Report on the 2014 National Workshop on Large Landscape Conservation

Wally Lippincott, AICP, Baltimore County Department of Planning

The 2014 National Workshop on Large Landscape Conservation took place in October 2014. Attended by over 500 people with hundreds of sessions, the conference was organized by a great deal of professionals. The special credit is due to committee members, Doug Austen of American Fisheries Society and Joel Dunn, of Chesapeake Conservancy. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife, State Wildlife agencies, and University presenters comprised the remainder of the conference committee. The conference was worth of years of their effort in the making.

The plenary speakers included Secretary Sally Jewell of the U.S. Department of Interior; Tom Visik (by video) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; Colin O’Mara, President of National Wildlife Federation; Mike Boots, White House Council on Environmental Quality; and Dr. Mamie Parker, President of MA Parker & Associates. Five hundred people attended this conference featuring hundreds of sessions.

I attended this conference as part of a panel presenting a session, “Farmland Preservation in the Mid-Atlantic for Large Landscape Conservation,” facilitated by Dr. Tom Daniels of the University of Pennsylvania. This conference session emphasized how the Mid-Atlantic States are the leader in the nation in agricultural land preservation with over 500,000 acres preserved. Baltimore, Harford, and Carroll counties in Maryland and York County in Pennsylvania have over 200,000 acres preserved among themselves and form the nucleus of a potentially large landscape conservation effort.

The conference workshops included spectacular landscape presentations including the “Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent: Connecting people to sustain and enhance culture, community and conservation.” This landscape encompassed the Rockies region including Yellowstone National Park and Grand Tetons National Park, northward into rural towns in Canada. The objectives of the program were to maintain a large and natural landscape that was sufficient to maintain keystone wildlife species, such as buffalo, grizzly bears, cougars, elk, coyotes, eagles, and wolves.

While many of the landscapes discussed at the conference were of a grander scale than we encounter in Maryland, the core messages were the same at the conferences. Mamie Parker spoke of the importance of diversity on our boards. Colin O’Mara deliberated about how people are disconnected and need to “meet people where they are,” instead of telling them what they should care about. Often, people’s understanding of an issue or whether they are concerned about an issue others feel is important, is under or over-estimated so planners need to hear what the issues are and what the people’s interest is with any issue before work can commence together toward a solution. Naomie Edelson conversed about merging social factors of poverty, homelessness, and sensory deprivation and how the National Wildlife Federation has sought to tackle these issues through creating and enhancing wildlife in our backyards, towns, or cities.

The land preservation in northern Baltimore County embraces a Large Regional Landscape. The county has been successful in central Maryland in its efforts to preserve agricultural land but mostly as a result of independent actions. Jonathon Peterson with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in his session presented the processes in the Large Landscape Conservation. Peterson identified three key characteristics of the large landscape conservation: (1) shift in geography to regional; (2) shift in perspective to not only interconnected but interdependent, and; (3) shift in the process to inclusiveness. It will be interesting to see if the northern Baltimore County landscape can be connected to the fledging Baltimore Wilderness Effort for creating a regional landscape with interdependencies between rural areas and the city inclusiveness.