

# A PLANNING PERSPECTIVE

APA-IOWA CHAPTER  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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JULY 2020, ISSUE 3

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## CHAPTER UPDATE FROM THE APA IA PRESIDENT

SUBMITTED BY DYLAN MULLENIX, AICP  
PRESIDENT, APA IOWA CHAPTER

Dear APA Iowa Members,

When we released our last newsletter, we were just entering the world of COVID 19-induced social distancing. Over the last several months the APA Iowa chapter has adapted to this reality, hosting board meetings and other chapter functions via Zoom. We have made the decision to continue doing this even as many locations in the state are opening. This is in line with the position taken by national APA and many other chapters, who are not planning to have in-person events through the rest of 2020. For APA Iowa, the most significant impact of this decision is that the 2020 Upper Midwest Conference, which was to be hosted in Des Moines in October, is moving to a virtual conference. Details are still forthcoming and will be announced in the coming month.

A silver-lining to hosting events virtually is that they have become more accessible to our members. The monthly Planning on Tap series, originally hosted as in-person events in central Iowa, have been attended by planners from throughout the state, and in some cases, from other states. Similarly, the conference moving to a virtual format has allowed the Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin chapters to collaborate on a true Upper Midwest Planning Conference, as Minnesota and Wisconsin will forego also hosting their own state conference.

Aside from the impact COVID-19 has had on the chapter's operations, the pandemic also has had a significant impact on our communities and planning. Many things planners have been advocating for years – increased telecommuting to relieve congestion, more outdoor placemaking, more and better bike/pedestrian facilities – quickly came about as a necessity. Yet others – such as transit usage and increased density – have become more challenging. Even the idea of what is essential for communities has likely changed in recent months, with access to internet, public health, and essential services like grocery stores joining the traditional sewer, roads, and water. Planners must figure out how to maintain the positives, mitigate the negatives, and learn from and adapt to these recent changes.

The other major change since the last newsletter is the renewed focus around racial injustice, sparked by the killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, and, unfortunately, many others before and since. APA Iowa has largely remained silent on the issue, as I want the chapter's response to be meaningful and actionable rather than merely virtue signaling. APA Iowa's mission is to "strengthen planning to create thriving communities". We must make certain that the planning we practice ensures that all within a community have the ability to thrive, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, national origin, and so forth. To this end, APA Iowa will continue to offer professional development highlighting the impacts that planning can have on social justice issues. In April APA Iowa partnered with the Polk County Housing Trust Fund for a virtual tour of their Undesign the Redline ([www.undesigndsm.com](http://www.undesigndsm.com)) exhibit. Plans are underway to offer additional programming in the coming months, with additional details to be announced in the coming weeks. Additionally, national APA has made resources available to planners, including an article about Racial Equity in Planning Organizations in a recent issue of the Journal of the American Planning Association, as well as a new Equity in Planning Video Series, highlighted on page 4 of this newsletter.

In closing, I want to thank the APA Iowa membership for all they do for the profession and their communities. I also want to challenge you to determine what you and your organizations can do to help the planning profession adapt to the changing landscape of our communities in light of COVID-19 and social justice. Please don't hesitate to contact me or any other board members if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions for the APA Iowa chapter.



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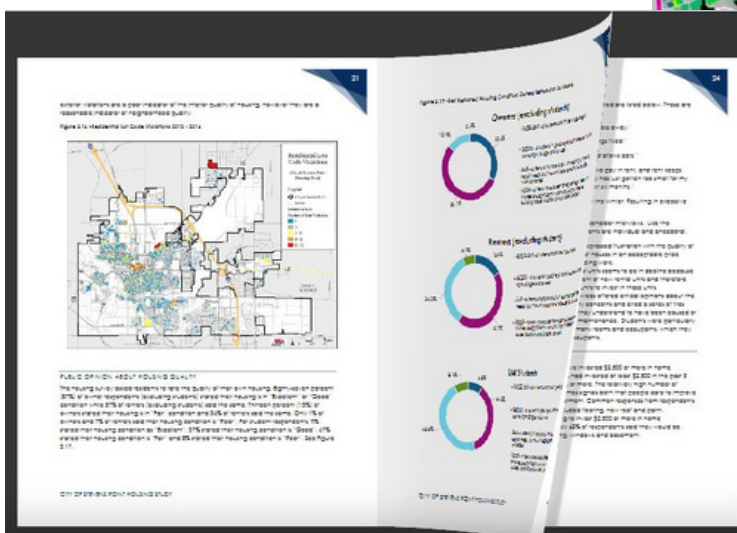
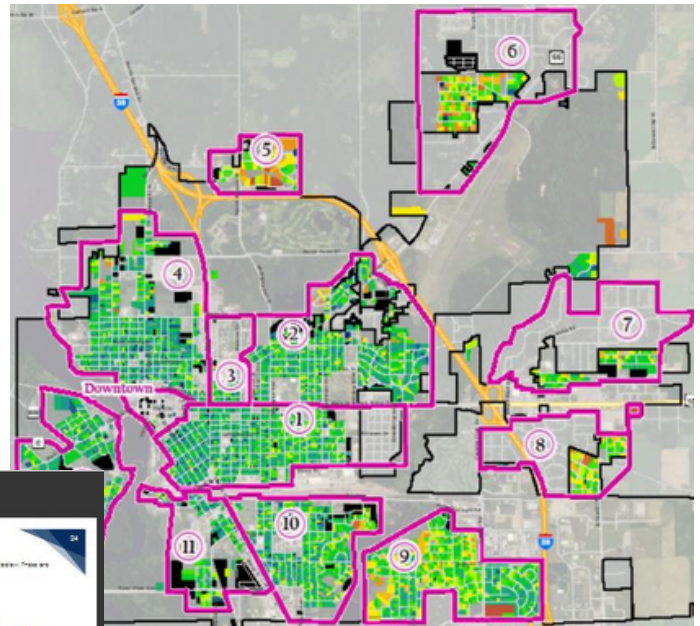


# AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHALLENGES, STUDIES AND ACTION PLANS

CHRIS JANSON, AICP, TEAM LEADER AT MSA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, INC. (MSA)  
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Affordable housing challenges every community of every size. Across Iowa, there continues to be a shortage of quality, affordable workforce housing, including a variety of single and multifamily dwellings, both rental and owner-occupied. The gaps in supply are not always easy to identify, nor are they easy to solve, especially when there are larger, more extensive issues at hand.

- **Housing Cost.**  
Over the past 60 years, housing costs have been increasing faster than wages across most income brackets. Adjusting for inflation, the average household income has increased about 30%. Meanwhile, the average cost of rent has increased about 70%—and home prices, 120%. These numbers are unsustainable, and for many, homeownership remains only a dream.
- **Housing Supply.**  
Housing demand is high and supply can't keep pace. This has led to a noticeable increase in townhome, multifamily and apartment living. Communities need to accommodate these evolving needs and deliver “missing middle” housing—everything in between single-unit detached homes and large, 50+ unit buildings.
- **Housing Quality.**  
Housing quality is somewhat subjective. There is a basic minimum for health and safety, but aesthetics and functionality are also critical. Focusing solely on new builds can be a liability, and the mistake of using low-cost materials or making sacrifices to meet a target price is common. Existing housing, on the other hand, can last over 100 years if thoughtfully reinvested in. Leaders must weigh whether maintaining current housing stock will suffice, or if new construction is needed to fill market gaps.



Above: Housing Study Neighborhood Assessment

Left: Housing Study Example

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# CONTINUED: AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHALLENGES, STUDIES AND ACTION PLANS

So, where do we go from here?

- Conduct a Housing Study.

A housing study is the best way to understand broader market forces, the condition and mix of housing units, local regulations and citizen demographics. It begins by collecting data from a variety of local, regional and national sources to assess current supply and demand. Next, interviews are conducted with realtors, lenders, developers, builders, landlords, city staff, social service providers, owners and renters to zero in on local market gaps and strategize ways to close them.

- Employ a Housing Action Plan.

A housing action plan is the bookend of a housing study—an implementable guide that outlines applicable regulatory changes, funding sources, public educational opportunities and steps to enable action. Although all housing studies utilize a similar framework, every community is unique in its condition and needs—and every action plan answers to a different mix of challenges and solutions.

- Create a Resilient Housing Market.

Local governments and professional planners can — and should — take a leadership role in the evolution of their community housing market. Charting a path forward begins with deciding that housing — and by extension, economic development — is a priority. A comprehensive assessment can identify gaps so that leaders can confidently move forward and give every resident a place to call home.

Connect with MSA for questions or to get the ball rolling.

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## IOWA RURAL SUMMIT 2020 - A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

The fourth annual Iowa Rural Summit, will be held virtually (Online via Zoom Platform) on August 20-21. Last year's gathering of leaders from rural communities from across the state drew a crowd of almost 400!

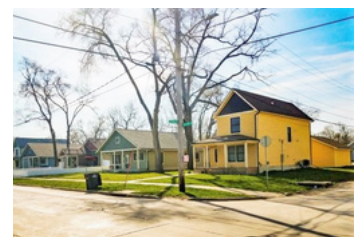
Iowa Rural Development Summit-Community Rate is one fee of \$150.00 for (1-5 people) or Council Member Rate of \$50.00. The \$150.00 registration will admit up to five community members to the 2020 Iowa Rural Development Summit.

The Summit is sponsored by the Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC), a public-private state non-profit that works to support small towns addressing issues such as housing, broadband access, business development and leadership.

"We are excited about this virtual Summit," said IRDC Chair Sandy Ehrig. "There is real value in coming together, even over a computer screen, at a time like this. Rural communities are facing unique challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Technology allows us to have this gathering, share experiences and best practices, and prepare our rural towns for the recovery that has already begun."

The 2020 Virtual Rural Summit will feature keynote addresses from two well-known Iowa speakers. Brooklyn, Iowa, native Steve Siemens will talk about rural collaboration and strategies for building rural partnerships. Atlantic-native David Williamson is a professional artist and poet. An inductee into the Iowa Rock'n Roll Hall of Fame after 50+ years of songwriting and performing, he will discuss art, creativity and community engagement.

"Steve and David provide great bookends to the Summit," Ehrig said. "But in between we will have sessions on issues ranging from community visioning to encouraging ag tech to accessing new funding programs. Our break-out session tracks are Facilities and Projects, Critical Issues and Facing the Future – and the content will be of use to anyone who lives in rural Iowa." For more information, contact Bill Menner using email: [director@iowardc.org](mailto:director@iowardc.org).





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# APA LAUNCHES EQUITY IN PLANNING VIDEO SERIES

CHICAGO (JULY 1, 2020)

APA is proud to release *Equity: The Planner's Responsibility*, the first video in a multi-part series demonstrating that equity is a necessary guiding principle for planners and all who participate in the process of planning as advisors, advocates, and decision makers.

In the aftermath of a global pandemic, and on the heels of civic awakening around racial injustice, local governments and planners are taking a fresh look at social equity as one of their greatest challenges — from a lack of access to health care and transportation for underserved communities, to increased exposure to environmental hazards, to a digital divide that impacts public participation.

The planning profession sadly bears responsibility for perpetuating policies and systems that have reinforced racism in the past, especially against the Black community and other communities of color. As recent events spark discussion around community solutions that seek to right the wrongs of the past, planners can and should lead efforts to reimagine great communities for all.

Planning professionals, especially AICP-certified planners who have demonstrated they have the knowledge, skills, and ethical commitment to promote equity, offer a holistic view of impacts and opportunities related to economic development, land use, resiliency and sustainability, cultural preservation, and other factors that bridge the worlds of built environment design, policy, and full societal potential.

"It's time to raise awareness around the fact that planners offer a unique perspective on the junction of governmental policy, private interest, and serving the public interest in our communities," said APA President Kurt A. Christiansen, FAICP.

"Voices of Equity in Planning recognizes the complexity of planning work in balancing community values, and explores the ethical principles and strategies planners use to be vigilant in addressing the needs of those who are often marginalized."

The videos include interviews with planners in the public and private sector across the country, whose work has centered equity for years. The series includes an overview video released this week, and several additional videos exploring equity in planning practice to be released in the coming weeks. The videos are available at [planning.org/voicesofequity](https://planning.org/voicesofequity). When additional videos are released they will also be added to the page. This project is part of APA's long-term equity, diversity and inclusion commitment.

## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Access tools that help you integrate equity into planning practice through APA's new Social Equity Research KnowledgeBase.
- Understand and apply the concept of "equity in all policies," as described in the Planning for Equity Policy Guide.
- Volunteer as an APA Ambassador to educate and empower youth, and reach diverse audiences with messaging about the value of planning in communities.
- Join one of APA's population-based divisions for more direct interaction with women, Latino, LGBTQ and Black planners.
- Volunteer on your local chapter diversity committee, or take the lead in creating new programs and initiatives.
- Enroll in the Diversity and Inclusion Training Series in APA Learn.



Participants at the Plan4Equity Forum in San Francisco at the 2019 National Planning Conference. Photo by The Photo Group.

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# COVID FUNDING & RECOVERY RESOURCES

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having a significant impact on communities, and planners are on the front lines of response and recovery. APA National is committed to providing resources, information, and tools to address planners immediate needs and help communities prepare for what is to come.

## APA Articles:

### 7 Ways to Respond to Regulation Rollbacks

Benjamin Hitchings, FAICP, offers seven sound, ethical suggestions for how to respond when public officials apply pressure to loosen planning regulations — without exceeding statutory authority or compromising longer-term planning visions. (APA Blog)

### Epidemiologist/Disaster Researcher Jennifer Horney Gives Planners Tips on Responding to COVID-19

Dr. Jennifer Horney, epidemiologist and disaster researcher at the University of Delaware, brings her expertise to some pressing public health questions, including how planners might serve as allies to medical and public health professionals. (APA YouTube)

## Resources:

CDBG Recovery Funds

Iowa Economic Development Authority - Iowa Resources

Iowa Economic Development Authority - Surveys & Research

Iowa Economic Development Authority - Funding Resources

Iowa Economic Development Authority - Recovery Guidance

Iowa League of Cities Resources

Iowa Small Business Tax Deferral program

Iowa State Association of Counties Resources

Paycheck Protection Program



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# IOWA COMMISSION FOR LATINO AFFAIRS AFFORDABLE HOUSING PANEL

CALEB KNUTSON, CITY PLANNER, CITY OF MARSHALLTOWN,

CKNUTSON@MARSHALLTOWN-IA.GOV

The APA Iowa Chapter is excited to partner with the Iowa Commission for Latino Affairs on an Affordable Housing Panel during the Upper Midwest Planning Conference! The panel consists of planners from across the state of Iowa with expert perspectives on how affordable housing issues effect vulnerable and under-served populations.

Current events have highlighted inequality throughout the country. In Iowa, predominantly rural affordable housing is still an issue to many of its residents, especially those residents that are in vulnerable populations and under-served communities.

The panel is respond to critical questions such as: Does a rural state like Iowa face gentrification? What even is gentrification? Is there a difference between gentrification and economic development? How does access to affordable housing impact vulnerable communities? What does affordable housing look like in rural communities? How can miss matched housing stock be addressed?

The panel will be hosted virtually as a free, complement session to the Upper Midwest Planning Conference on Wednesday, October 14th from 4:30-6:30 pm.

Panelists include:

- Ted Grevstad-Nordbrock, PhD, Department of Community and Regional Planning, Iowa State University
  - Kendyl Larson, Director of Research and Planning, Polk County Housing Trust Fund
  - Johnny Alcivar, AICP, Director of Workforce Programs, Proteus, Inc
  - Julie Winter, Region 6 Resource Partners
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# IOWA PLANNER SPOTLIGHT:

## ALEXSIS FLEENER

### Current Title and Organization:

Community Development Director  
Southwest Iowa Planning Council

### Degree & School Attended:

Master of Regional and Community Planning,  
Kansas State University

### What are your areas of expertise?

Community and Economic Development, Federal Grant  
Funding Programs, Rural and Regional Planning

### Why did you decide to become a planner?

I spent my high school years witnessing and being a part of disaster recovery and rebuilding after a large tornado devastated my hometown. I remember the community meetings and design charattes the summer after and being really interested in what the people that were facilitating were doing. That is how I found out what "planning" was and the rest is history. I just wasn't expecting 13 years later that I would be working so much on the disaster recovery side of planning and development.

### What aspects of planning do you enjoy the most?

When it comes down to it I really enjoy building relationships with people and working together towards a common goal. I like helping communities improve not only through a planning process but I also get to see physical improvement projects from start to finish and have the satisfaction of playing a role in it.

### Describe a recent project you've contributed to that you are proud of. Why is it important? Highlight methods that made the project a success.

I absolutely love my job and the work I get to do throughout the region but I would be remiss if I didn't talk about a project that I have been a part of in my personal time that I am really proud of. So much of what I do professionally is support cities and projects as more of a consultant. Through my day job I completed the City of Atlantic's Comprehensive Plan update a couple years ago. It was an interesting experience completing a plan in the town that I live. What I discovered through that process was that there is a lot of desire to build on the already good community and improve and grow it for future generations but not a lot of people stepping forward with action. A little over a year ago I had the opportunity to launch a non-profit focused on community and economic development in Atlantic with a few other amazing and ambitious women. We have all contributed our talents and skills to entice excitement and generate positive change in our small community. We are starting with one building rehab project but our overall goal is to get people, especially younger/middle aged people, involved in the progression and development of our community by working together and turning aspirations into action.

### What is one planning challenge you foresee for Iowa or your community over the next 10 years? What preparation do you recommend to meet this challenge?

Rural population decline. I see small towns spinning their wheels trying to land a big industrial development or large employer or simply maintaining status quo. I think small cities find success when they focus on the population they do have and work towards being the best community for the people that currently live there. Empowering the community to take ownership and get involved is contagious. Supporting entrepreneurs is noticeable. Fixing up housing is welcoming. Rural cities need to be resourceful and know how to work with all the resources that are available in the state and it starts with planning.

### What is one planning challenge you foresee for Iowa or your community over the next 10 years? What preparation do you recommend to meet this challenge?

Cities and the Wealth of Nations- Jane Jacobs

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# DON'T MISS OUT CHECK OUT THESE OPPORTUNITIES...

## JOB POSTINGS

### Community Planner II

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Waterloo  
Employer: INRCOG  
Deadline: Open until Filled

### Executive Director

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Mason City  
Employer: NIACOG  
Deadline: May 3, 2020

### Planner

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Des Moines  
Employer: Polk County  
Deadline: July 23, 2020

### Policy Planning Director

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: St. Paul, MN  
Employer: MN DOT  
Deadline: July 27, 2020

**Did You Know?** You can now post jobs directly to the APA Iowa website for free! This is a feature of the new chapter website. To post a job, visit <https://iowa.planning.org/career-center/job-posting-instructions/>.

## 2020 CENSUS

The State of Iowa Complete Count Committee, with Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg as chair and Secretary of State Paul Pate as vice chair, has launched a "Key to the Future" response rate challenge for all of Iowa's 942 cities and 99 counties to boost their 2020 Census response rates.

To learn more about how your community or county can accept the challenge, click [here](#)!

The challenge is based on the 2020 Census Response Rate Map, which tracks self-response rates of households at the national, state, and local levels. The map also lists 2010 Census response rates for each state, city and county.



## TODAY: VIRTUAL PLANNING ON TAP

Virtual learning and networking opportunity! The Planning On Tap series will be held via Zoom this afternoon, Thursday, July 9th and available to all APA-Iowa Members.

Join for a panel discussion featuring Eric Holthaus, City of Cedar Rapids Sustainability Coordinator, Allison Van Pelt, Senior Planner with Des Moines Area MPO, and Brenda Nations, Climate Action Coordinator with City of Iowa City.

Thursday, July 9 - 3-4pm

Register online:

## UPCOMING EVENTS

July 9: Virtual Planning on Tap, 3-4pm

July 17: APA Iowa Chapter Board Meeting

October 12-14: APA Upper Midwest Virtual Conference

October 14: Iowa Commission for Latino Affairs Affordable Housing Panel

Fill out the form to be featured in our Planner Spotlight.

Submit your community updates for October's newsletter by Friday, October 16th.

Follow us on Facebook to stay up to date on events and happenings.

