

The Nebraska Planner

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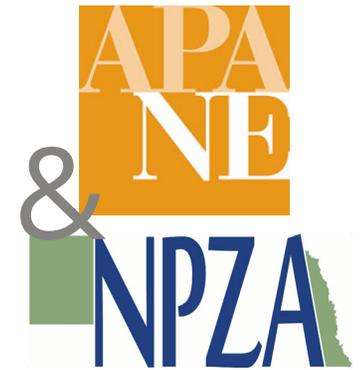
CALL FOR SESSIONS FOR THE 2021 NEBRASKA PLANNING CONFERENCE DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 16TH!

The 2021 Nebraska Planning Conference hosted by NPZA and APA NE is scheduled for September 15-17, 2021 in Kearney. We are seeking a broad range of professionals to address the many issues and challenges associated with the planning profession as a presenter during one of the conference sessions. Sessions typically include 60 minutes of presentation time and 15 minutes for Q&A. The presentation interest form must be submitted by April 16, 2021 and presenters will be notified on or before June 1, 2021 whether or not their session was selected. To submit your form, or for more information, please visit npza.org/conference.

AICP EXAM DIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP

The American Planning Association is committed to providing opportunities for all to achieve excellence in planning by fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion in the organization and in the planning profession. AICP scholarships help make the planning profession more diverse and accessible to those with financial need. Diversity is an inclusive concept which encompasses, but not is not limited to race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexuality, ability, educational attainment, spiritual beliefs, creed, culture, tribal affiliation, nationality, immigration status, political beliefs, and veteran status.

This scholarship is awarded with the intention to diversify the planning profession. To apply please submit a brief letter describing how you identify with any of the diverse populations listed above along with your APA ID number to PDO Stephanie Rouse, AICP at rouseplanning@gmail.com. The scholarship reduces the financial burden to \$210 instead of the full \$510. Please note the awarding of a scholarship does not guarantee essay approval or a passing exam score. For the November exam cycle, letters are due by May 28th.



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Presidents' Updates - 2
- Legislative Update - 3
- Planner Profile - 7
- Book Club Review - 9
- FAICP Process & Call for Nominations- 11
- NU Team Earns Top 10 Finish in Pandemic Reponse Challenge - 13
- Summer Book Club - 15
- Job Postings & Upcoming Events - 16
- Resources - 17

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PRESIDENTS' UPDATES

Spring, a time of birth, growth, and renewed hope and energy. That appears to be especially true this spring as we are starting to see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. With the vaccine roll-out expected to be available to the majority of the population by early summer, there's hope that restrictions will be finally removed in the future and we can resume all pre-pandemic activities without restraint.

NPZA recently held its first Spring Workshop. A virtual event like the Fall Workshop last year, it provided a very affordable planning and zoning learning opportunity to individuals and organizations alike.

The Spring Workshop was a great training event in my eyes, but it also excited me for what's to come. This year's Nebraska Planning Conference! NPZA and Nebraska APA have already started working hard to make this year's conference a great in-person event to be held September 15-17 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

For more information on upcoming training opportunities and other NPZA activities, please check out the [NPZA website](#) or follow our activities on Facebook and Twitter as well.



Christopher Solberg, AICP - NPZA President



Spring 2021 is finally here and we are starting to see a glimpse to the end of the global COVID-19 pandemic. While it is easy to focus on the negatives of the last year and our current health crisis, I prefer to look at my glass half full. Some of those positives include: the impact a "buy Local" only option can have on a community's sales tax revenue; how to communicate better in a remote and virtual setting; the significance of good broadband (or the lack of); the need for social interaction for my mental health; and how to participate in events without the cost and time for travel. Many of these items can continue into the future without the lock down and social distancing requirements in place.

Speaking of time and money savings by participating in virtual events, I encourage you to consider registering and attending the NCP 2021, <https://www.planning.org/conference/program/>. This may provide you an opportunity to engage with other planner across the globe in sessions and with keynote speakers that we are not able to provide here in Nebraska at our annual conference.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns at jray@jeo.com or (402) 779-1070



Jeff Ray, AICP - APA-NE President



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY: DAVID LEVY

The First Session of the 107th Nebraska Legislature convened on January 6, 2021. Bill introduction concluded on January 20, 2021. Following bill introduction, we identified five major initiatives and 17 bills of interest regarding planning, land use, municipal law, and economic development.

Below are summaries and status updates of those bills. We will continue tracking these bills as the legislative session proceeds. Please do not hesitate to reach out directly with any questions. Thank you.

MAJOR INITIATIVES:

LB 40 - Nebraska Rural Projects Act

LB 40 would adopt the Rural Development Projects Act. The bill would provide an incentive to develop industrial rail access business parks in counties with populations of less than 100,000. An eligible nonprofit economic development corporation could apply to receive a dollar-for-dollar match of its total investment in an eligible project. The bill would cap available funds at \$10 million. Applicants would have to submit an application by December 31, 2022.

LB 156 - Municipal Inland Port Authority Act & Change Provisions of the Site and Building Development Act

LB 156 would adopt the Municipal Inland Port Authority Act which would allow cities of the municipal, primary and first class to create inland port authorities in eligible areas. Eligible areas include navigable river or waterways, major rail lines, major interstates or highways and major airports. The creation of the port authorities would enable the development of shovel-ready commercial and industrial sites which would serve as the regional merging point for multi-modal transportation. The bill would only allow the creation of five port authorities throughout the state.

Once created, the Act would allow a port authority to levy sales and use tax, issue and sell revenue bonds, and borrow or receive money from both public and private sources. Port authorities would also be tax exempt. The port authority could acquire, lease or sell real property. However, the port authority would not have eminent domain power. The Urban Affairs Legislative Committee selected LB 156 as a priority bill on March 11, 2021. On March 24, the Legislature advanced the bill to Select File.

LB 194 - Change the Nebraska Job Creation and Mainstreet Revitalization Act

LB 194 would amend the Nebraska Job Creation and Mainstreet Revitalization Act to expand eligible projects, increase limits on project credits, and repeal current deadlines. The bill would relax project eligibility requirements for Nebraska Historic Tax Credits ("NHTC").

First and foremost, LB 194 would increase the credit percentage. Currently, the credit is 20 percent of eligible expenditures up to a maximum of \$1,000,000 for any project. Under the bill, the credit would be 25 percent of eligible expenditures for qualifying properties in counties that include a city of the metropolitan or primary class. For all other counties, the credit would be 30 percent of eligible expenditures. In all cases, the maximum credit for any project would increase from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000.

Next, the bill would expand eligibility. It would remove an exception which prohibits eligibility for single-family detached residences. It also would expand the definition of a qualifying "improvement" by lowering the eligibility threshold to projects with a total cost of \$5,000 or greater. In addition, eligible expenditures would include engineering fees and costs generally related to historical preservation which the recipient could incur up to six months prior to application.

Finally, the bill would repeal the current NHTC filing deadline of December 31, 2022. The Revenue Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 4, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 424 - Provide and Change Zoning Requirements for Wind Energy Generation Projects

LB 424 would amend zoning restrictions relating to wind energy generation projects. Beginning September 1, 2021, the bill would prevent construction of a wind energy generation project in any county unless such county currently has in place or adopts zoning regulations meeting minimum standards. The minimum standards would include fixed-distance setbacks from residences and property lines, noise restrictions, decommissioning terms and conditions, and fees for conditional use permits. The bill would also eliminate a county or municipality's ability to grant exceptions or "variances" from such minimum standards for wind energy generation systems. The bill would impose identical restrictions on public and school lands. The Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 26, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 544 - Adopt the Urban Redevelopment Act and Provide Tax Incentives

LB 544 would adopt the Urban Redevelopment Act. The Act would provide incentives for investment and job creation in "economic redevelopment areas" within cities of the metropolitan or primary class. Economic redevelopment area would mean an area where the average rate of unemployment is at least 150 percent of the state average, and the average poverty rate is 20 percent or more for the federal census tract in the area.

To receive incentives under the Act, an applicant would apply to the Director of Economic Development (the "Director"). The Director would not accept applications after December 31, 2031. There would also be an \$8,000,000 cumulative benefit limit.

There would be two tiers of incentives under the Act. First, would be applicants who: (i) commit to a cumulative investment in qualifying property of at least \$150,000 and hire at least five new employees at the qualified location within two years of application; and (ii) pay a minimum qualifying wage of at least 70 percent of the statewide average to said employees. Such applicants could receive a tax credit of \$3,000 for each qualifying employee and \$4,000 for each qualifying employee who lives in an economic redevelopment area. Such applicants could also receive a tax credit of \$2,750 for each \$50,000 of qualifying investment.

Second, would be applicants who commit to a cumulative investment in qualifying property of at least \$50,000 within two years of application. Such applicants could receive a tax credit equal to five percent of the qualifying investment. Applicants could not qualify for both tiers and in no case could an applicant's tax credit exceed \$50,000. Applicants would have to maintain their investment and employment levels for the duration of the term of their commitment. The Act would set forth a direct tax payment and refund procedure for any period in which an applicant fails to meet the required levels of investment and employment. The Revenue Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 18, 2021. On March 11, 2021, Senator Wayne designated the bill as a priority bill. On March 12, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File. On March 23, 2021, the Legislature unanimously voted to advance the bill to Select File.

OTHER BILLS OF INTEREST:

LB 9 would amend provisions relating to the annexation of land by cities and villages and would amend provisions relating to special valuation of agricultural or horticultural land therein. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 9, 2021. On February 18, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File with an amendment. As amended, the bill would create an exception allowing cities of the first class in counties with at least three cities of the first class to annex land which would be contiguous with the corporate limits but for a contiguity interruption by land owned by the federal government.

Annexation under the bill would not result in any change to the service area of any electric utility without an express agreement from such electric utility. The bill also would authorize special valuation of agricultural or horticultural land in certain circumstances.

LB 25 amends the Community Development Law by increasing the repayment period for Tax Increment Financing (“TIF”) from 15 years to 20 years for “extremely blighted areas.” On November 3, 2020, Nebraska voters approved LRCA 2 authorizing a TIF repayment period of 20 years for areas where more than 50 percent of properties are extremely blighted. LB 25 codifies the same. The Legislature passed LB 25 on March 11, 2021 with an emergency clause, meaning the bill took effect when passed and approved. The governor approved the bill on March 17, 2021.

LB 99 would work in tandem with LB 25. The bill would exclude “extremely blighted areas” from the maximum percentage of property a municipality may designate as a blighted area under current statute. Said percentage limits would otherwise preclude many municipalities from reaching the aforementioned 50 percent threshold necessary for the 20-year TIF repayment period under LB 25. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on January 26, 2021. On February 28, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File.

LB 81 would authorize sanitary and improvement districts to own, construct, and maintain public parking facilities. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 16, 2021. On March 3, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File. On March 17, 2021 the Speaker of the Legislature designated the bill as a priority bill.

LB 96 would amend provisions related to sanitary and improvement district hearings to require delivery of notice by mail or e-mail to resident property owners and posting of notice in public locations. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 16, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 168 would eliminate authorization for creation of sanitary and improvement districts on or after July 1, 2021. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 16, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 257 would amend provisions relating to vacancies on public power and irrigation district boards by authorizing said boards to fill any vacancies therein. The Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 25, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 267 would amend provisions relating to municipal counties. The bill would set forth procedure for the creation of municipal counties by merger or consolidation of one or more counties and a city of the metropolitan class. Said municipal counties would be subject to governance by interjurisdictional planning commissions. The bill would also ease budget restrictions related to such governance. The Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 4, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 332 would amend statutes relating to city councils in cities of the metropolitan class. Beginning with the 2025 general election, the bill would increase the number of city council districts in such cities, and therefore council members, from seven to nine. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 2, 2021. On February 18, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File with an amendment. The amendment provides that the new city council districts would be drawn by the city council instead of the county election commissioner.

LB 446, as introduced, proposed to adopt the Nebraska Housing Index and Financing Investment Act. The Act would have created a comprehensive index for data regarding state housing capacity and the availability of state and federal housing incentives. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 23, 2021. On March 3, 2021, the Committee placed the bill on General File with an amendment.

As amended, the bill would require the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (“NIFA”) to submit a summary housing report to the Legislature’s Urban Affairs Committee and Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee every two years. The bill would give NIFA flexibility to develop and implement a system to track and index housing capacity and resource allocation. The bill’s stated intent is to better inform policymakers and developers on state housing matters so that they may improve housing access and allocate resources efficiently.

LB 482 would expand the prohibition on a public official or employee’s use of public resources for campaign purposes. The bill would prohibit a political subdivision’s transfer of affiliation assessments or membership dues to any private entity for use as a contribution to a candidate or committee. Thus, it would close a loophole to the aforementioned prohibition. The Government, Military and Veteran Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 10, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 502 would amend the Nebraska Advantage Act. The Act seeks to attract businesses to Nebraska by offering tiered tax incentives based on the level said businesses’ commitment for investment and job creation within the state. The Act expired on December 31, 2020, but applications filed on or before that date may continue to receive benefits under the Act. In lieu of the current tax refund, the bill would create a sales tax exemption for qualifying expenditures. It would also set forth a new direct payment and refund procedure for any period in which a business fails to meet the required levels of investment and employment. The Revenue Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 18, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 513 would amend provisions relating to public power district board members. Beginning in 2022, the bill would reduce the term of a board member from six to four years. It would also require a board member to be a retail customer of the applicable district to hold office. The Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 3, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 555 would amend reporting requirements under the Municipal Density and Missing Middle Housing Act. The bill would require a city to include in its report the percentage of areas zoned for residential use which it declares substandard and blighted areas and extremely blighted areas under the Community Development Law. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 23, 2021. On March 3, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File.

LB 556 would amend the Community Development Law by authorizing a city to place additional requirements on the division of ad valorem taxes under a redevelopment contract. The city would have to deem the requirements necessary to ensure that the redevelopment project complies with the city’s comprehensive development plan, affordable housing action plan, zoning regulations, or any other reasonable planning requirement or goal. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 23, 2021. On March 3, 2021, the Committee voted to place the bill on General File.

LB 627 would amend statutes relating to qualified voters in certain public power district elections. The bill would expand the registered voter pool in such elections by including those voters that reside within the incorporated or unincorporated area of a county that includes a city of the metropolitan or primary class and which overlaps any portion of a public power district with an annual gross revenue of \$150,000,000 or more. The Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 3, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

LB 653 would amend the Community Development Law. The bill would require cities to establish goals for HUB utilization for redevelopment projects for which the division of ad valorem taxes exceeds \$200,000. It would also incorporate HUB utilization into current reporting requirements and authorize a city to make redevelopment contracts conditional upon HUB utilization. The Urban Affairs Committee held a hearing on the bill on February 23, 2021. The Committee has not yet voted on the bill.

PLANNER PROFILE – JENNIFER DAM, AICP

BY: STEVE MILLER, AICP

One of the best reasons to belong to professional organizations like the Nebraska Chapter of the American Planning Association and the Nebraska Planning and Zoning Association is meeting other professional planners and building a network of people who do similar work. The contacts you make often become mentors, advisors, colleagues and friends. This is the second in an ongoing series of Nebraska planner profiles for the Nebraska Planner Newsletter. The goal of this series is to inform you about and introduce you to the diverse group of people who make planning and zoning happen in Nebraska.

Jennifer Dam, AICP, is the Planning Director for the City of Fremont, Nebraska. Jennifer has had a trailblazing career in planning that has taken her from graduate school at the University of Kansas, where I first met her, to leadership roles in planning at the City of Papillion, the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, and at the City of Fremont. I have been fortunate to work with Jennifer over the years and she is the consummate professional. I consider her a friend too. Jennifer has worked to advance the planning profession through her involvement with Nebraska APA and numerous professional organizations. Jennifer graciously took the time to share some brief thoughts about her background, her experience, and what she values as a planner. Please see Jennifer’s responses to the following five questions:

1. Describe your current job or the current work you’re doing.

I am the Planning Director for the City of Fremont. I am essentially a one-person shop, so I do it all! In addition to reviewing requests for zoning changes, subdivisions and conditional use permits, I answer all of the daily questions about zoning and what people can do with their property.

Fremont is a bit behind the times and does not have a GIS system. I budgeted to develop one and put together a RFP to hire a firm to develop a parcel base and several layers for us. I also recently interviewed and hired a firm to update our Comprehensive Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan and Unified Development Code.

2. What did you want to be when you were growing up and how did you get into planning?

I have always had broad interests, and my thoughts of what I wanted to do varied. At one point I thought I might like to be a college professor in either History or Anthropology. I also was interested in Economics. I eventually settled on Planning because it seemed to be a career that would mesh together a variety of interests.

3. Describe a mentor or someone who had an impact on your career.

I had a director who has served as a mentor throughout my career. She encouraged me to expand my skills and to apply for higher level positions. She has remained a friend and has provided solid advice throughout my career. Another mentor gave me some sage advice: “Know what it is that you are willing to be fired for and know what it is that you are willing to quit over.”

4. What advice would you give a young planner just starting their career?

Listen to your colleagues, developers, citizens and politicians to understand their points of view. Understand the culture of your community. Get involved with a professional organization.

5. What has been your involvement in APA, NPZA, and other professional organizations and how has it helped you as a planner?

I have been involved in a variety of professional organizations throughout my career. Early in my career I was the Vice-president and PDO for Nebraska APA. During that time, we hosted the Western Planner conference in Lincoln. We were fortunate to have Doug Bereuter (who wrote most of the planning statutes in Nebraska) give the keynote address. I was active in leadership roles in HEFMA, a campus and space planning group of the Big 10 universities, during my tenure as the campus planner at UNL. I have given presentations at NPZA and at SCUP (Society for Campus & University Planning) conferences.

Involvement in professional organizations has been a terrific way to meet colleagues, develop friendships, develop leadership skills, and learn new things that you can bring back to benefit your organization or career.

EMERGING PLANNERS GROUP - BOOK CLUB REVIEW

BY: CALE BRODERSEN

Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis By Dan Parolek

This March the Emerging Planners Group hosted the Spring Book Club and discussed Dan Parolek's book *Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis*. This book explores the large discrepancy between existing housing stock and the types of housing that people both want and need; housing types that Dan has labeled "Missing Middle Housing".

Parolek defines Missing Middle Housing as "a range of multiunit or clustered housing types, compatible in scale with single-family homes, that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living, respond to shifting household demographics, and meet the need for more housing choices at different price points."

These housing types include duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, town houses, and other multiplexes that resemble large homes, as presented in the graphic at the bottom of the page.

Most of these housing types haven't been commonly built in US cities for decades due to strict zoning requirements that prioritize single-family houses on large lots, or large apartment buildings that contrast greatly with the single-family housing scale. As we anticipate an increase in the percentage of single-person households and households without children in the coming decades, the need for smaller and more affordable housing units in walkable communities will increase greatly. To meet this need, Dan estimates that 60% of all new housing constructed over the next several decades will need to be missing Middle Housing (MMH).

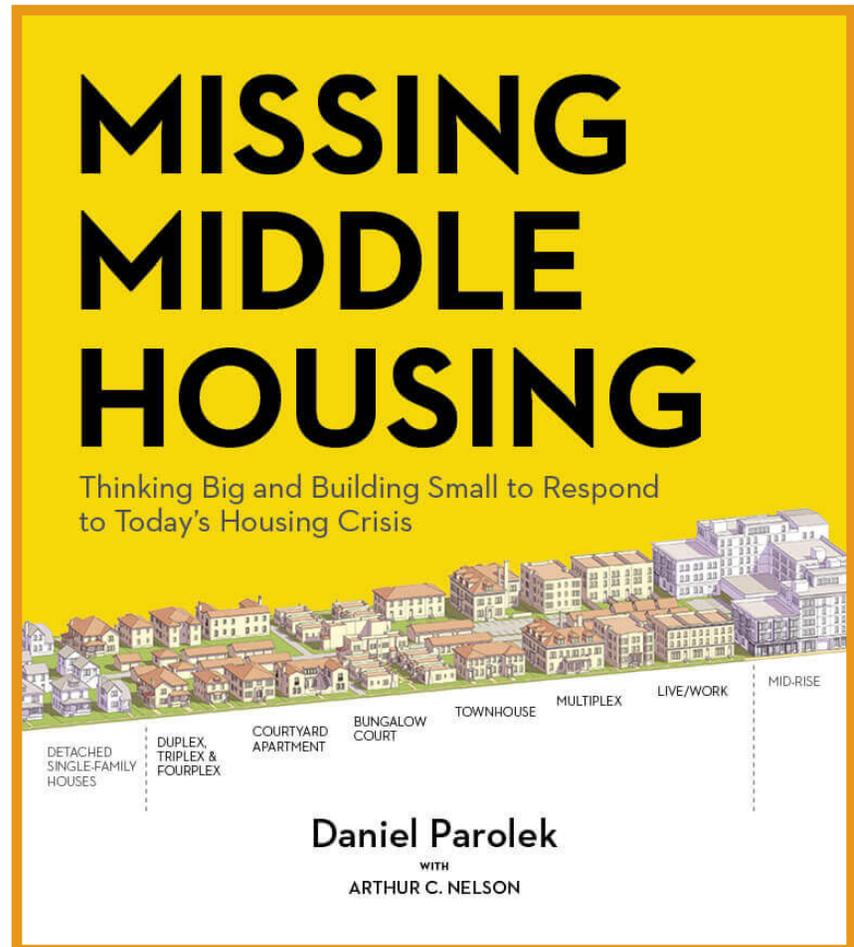


Dan breaks down common barriers to the delivery of these diverse housing types, which include planning and zoning barriers (such as density requirements and overburdensome off-street parking requirements), community or neighborhood opposition, lack of industry standards, perceived cost inefficiencies for building small, and more. The density-focused zoning codes that many communities employ cannot adequately address the need for missing-middle housing. Rather than use and density, we need to regulate form, scale, and layout. Many cities around the country are adopting form-based zoning codes that do just that. They create building width and depth maximums and height restrictions that ensure that higher-density housing types can remain compatible with single family homes.

The strategic delivery of missing middle housing types can be an effective tool to provide greater housing affordability considering the potential lower construction costs (building smaller units), reduction in the cost of transportation for residents if the housing is in a walkable community, the sharing of land costs (more units per acre), and the opportunities that exist for households to earn extra income and build equity by renting out attached units. However, with such a high-demand for these housing types and the current slow rate at which they are being delivered due to the many barriers, many of the current case studies for delivery of MMH include high-end or market rate units.

Parolek provides specific instructions for the necessary lot requirements that are appropriate for each type of missing middle housing, elaborates on how off-street parking requirements must be handled to make the construction of MMH economically feasible, gives guidance on how to identify the locations in your community that are best suited for MMH, and shares many great case studies to help you spark conversation and further your education. This is a must-read guidebook for planners and professionals interested in housing and walkable communities.

Don't worry if you missed out this time, the Emerging Planners Group hosts quarterly book clubs. Join us in June for the next one! E-mail cbrodersen@cityoflavista.org for more information!



FAICP DECODED

BY: STEPHANIE ROUSE, AICP

The AICP College of Fellows is the highest honor awarded to members of the American Planning Association. This distinction is awarded every two years and we are approaching the end of the nomination cycle for the Class of 2022, due August 25, 2021. The program was envisioned in 1998 by then president Roger Hendrick, FAICP who saw “a need to recognize and honor planners whose career exhibits excellence.” The first class in 1999 included 45 AICP members. The first six classes were inducted annually, but in 2004 it was decided to make the process biannual.

Becoming a Fellow is more than recognition of years of dedication and volunteering, but serves as a membership of planners that advance the profession further. Each year at the National Planning Conference Fellows meet to discuss initiatives such as involvement, engagement strategies, mentorship, pro bono service programs, and other regional efforts to advance the field.

Statistics

As of 2018 there were 636 Fellow's, 88% who are still living. Only 42% of Fellow's are women, a statistic the [Women in Planning Division](#) is working to level out through support to their members and a targeted campaign to nominate more women in the coming years. Of the four categories for nomination—professional practice, community service & leadership, teaching & mentoring, and research—the majority of members have been inducted under professional practice (57%) and only 4% under research. There was a rise in inductees in the last few cycles, up from an average of about 40 to about 60 in the past few classes. Unfortunately, our own chapter has just two FAICP members—Marty Shukert and Richard Wozniak, neither of whom were inducted in recent cycles.



As some of our own chapter members have learned, not all members who submit a nomination are selected. The success rate in 2018 was 65% and was only 45% in 2014. The 2016 class was a little better with 73% of nominations accepted. The rate of inducted members who resubmitted after being declined has been trending upwards from a low of 20% in 2010 up to 75% in 2018. One task of the existing field of Fellows is to review the program criteria and ensure it meets its intended goal of recognizing and honoring planners. That is why early in 2021 FAICP members reached out to chapter Professional Development Officers to get a better understanding of barriers to submitting nominations and perceptions of the program. It is our hope that the percent accepted may go up during the next few classes.

The Process

The nominations can come from three sources—the Chapter presidents, a Division chair, or with the support of 10 AICP members who are up to date on their CM credits and dues.

Based on feedback, this cycle nominees are able to select an unlimited number of career focus areas. Removing the career focus areas from the guidelines and instead providing them as a standalone resource for nominees to consider helps the nominee prepare their nomination and allows the committee to focus on the general criteria which are the most important and ultimate measure of all nominations.

To determine whether you are eligible to apply you must first have been an AICP member for 15 years with good standing (dues paid, CM credits up to date, and no ethical violations). The second component is more difficult to calculate and is often what leads to declined applications. You must show an outstanding contribution to the profession over an extended period of time. Many that have applied call the process “difficult, but rewarding.” It requires you to look back over 15+ years of work and condense it down into a concise application. You must reach out to past mentors and peers for letters of support which provides the opportunity to reconnect. One recommendation for any early career planners is to keep a log of all your activities. Whether you volunteered on boards, wrote articles, taught a class, mentored others, were recognized with an award, or helped plan a conference you should keep track of all these activities. This will help when 15 years later you are preparing the 10 page annotated resume.

As the nomination guide states “a successful nomination to the College of Fellows requires considerable effort on the part of both the nominator and the nominee.” That is why the Nebraska Chapter offers support to anyone interested in submitting a nomination as part of the Awards Committee focus. If you feel you meet the requirements and would like to discuss it further, reach out to Bruce Fountain, AICP at bfountain@cityoflavista.org. We currently have 34 AICP members who could be eligible for the 2022 Class of Fellows.

It may be a lot of work, but the reward is well worth it. Help us boost our Nebraska representation in the College and maybe even induct the first women from Nebraska. Reach out today!

NU TEAM EARNS TOP 10 FINISH IN PANDEMIC RESPONSE CHALLENGE

BY: KARL VOGEL REPRINTED FROM NEWS.UNL.EDU WITH PERMISSION

A team of researchers from three University of Nebraska institutions finished among the top 10 teams in a global competition to develop an artificial intelligence-driven model to advise policymakers on how best to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December, after phase 1 of the \$500,000 Pandemic Response Challenge — run by XPRIZE, which designs and operates incentive competitions to solve the world’s grand challenges — the Nebraska team was among 48 teams from 17 countries chosen to advance to the final phase. Nearly 500 teams from around the world entered the competition, which was sponsored by Cognizant.

Fadi Alsaleem, assistant professor of architectural engineering at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and an expert in big data analysis, put together the team nearly a year ago to tackle another pandemic-related project in which data from Bluetooth-enabled Kinsa thermometers was used to help predict outbreaks across Nebraska.

In addition to Alsaleem, the Nebraska team includes:

- Alison Freifeld, professor of internal medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and an infectious diseases expert;
- Basheer Qolomany, assistant professor of computer science at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and an expert in deep learning in support of smart services and disease progression;
- Dan Piatkowski, assistant professor of community and regional planning in the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s College of Architecture; and
- Three of Alsaleem’s graduate students — Ali Hazem Al Ramini, Mohammad Ali Takallou and Mostafa Rafaie, now a data scientist with Mutual of Omaha.



That original project was the starting point for the work done in the Pandemic Response Challenge. After learning about the XPRIZE competition this past fall, the Nebraska team had to work quickly to enter by the November deadline.

Since the initial approval of COVID-19 vaccines in December, the global pandemic has raged on, as more than 25 million additional people have been diagnosed with the disease. The Pandemic Response Challenge aims to harness the power of data and artificial intelligence in equipping policymakers, health officials and business leaders with insights and guidance necessary to implement public safety measures and safely deliver the vaccine, maximizing their ability to keep local economies open while minimizing potential virus breakouts.

In phase 1, teams were tasked with analyzing local COVID-19 data, intervention strategies and mitigation policies to develop and test a prediction model that could anticipate global infection spikes.

“Our model is good at predicting future cases, but when you think about the state government, what can you do to reduce cases in Nebraska? That’s why we need a predictive model,” Alsaleem said. “If you close the schools, we expect the numbers to do this. If people are asked to work from home, the numbers do that. Phase 2 is about optimization of the response, giving government a way to evaluate various scenarios and all the factors to come up with the best plan that can have minimal impact on people’s lives.”

Despite the rush, Alsaleem said, the Nebraska entry was among the most accurate models.

“We arrived late in the game, two weeks from deadline,” he said. “We hurried to put something together and our goal was to be among the top 50.

“Most of the work and the data is focusing on what is happening here in Nebraska, but to apply the model across the whole world and see that it’s performing at least as well as other models is very gratifying. It was a good surprise.”

Phase 2, which ended Feb. 3, required the finalists to develop a prescriptor model — or prescribed action plan. Those models were evaluated against key benchmarks, including minimizing the number of cases and the cost of intervention plans.

Instead of focusing solely on data gathered in Nebraska, the team was required to study the results of responses from around the world when developing its model. That, Alsaleem said, caused a little concern.

“Taking a global approach is encouraging a special regime,” he said. “You do it for one place and it works, but sometimes you model something else and it fails.”

Even with limited data, Qolomany said, the predictions were surprisingly accurate and well-behaved.

“With deep-learning types of models, as more data becomes available, the approach can be increasingly useful in dealing with COVID-19, as well as possible future pandemics,” he said. “In this project, the AI system is not designed to replace human decision-makers, but instead to empower them: Humans choose which tradeoffs are the best, and the AI makes suggestions on how they can be achieved.”

The medical and clinical perspectives Freifeld provided allowed for “a bird’s-eye view of the pandemic” that she said helped the team determine which parameters were most important when developing the models.

“We’re all in our own bubbles of sorts when it comes to science. We have our own areas of expertise, and the point of this challenge is to have a breadth of knowledge in the team,” she said. “It’s such a privilege to work with colleagues across the University of Nebraska system on a project of such global importance. This is a very rare occurrence, and it should be supported and celebrated.”

Piatkowski said the short turnaround between phases brought out the best in the Nebraska team.

“I think one of the strengths in this team, and across the NU system, is how quickly everyone jumped on board and was ready to provide perspectives and expertise from their own disciplines,” he said. “It’s certainly nice to be competitive against such impressive teams, but it also underscores our strengths in both scientific excellence and collaboration here in Nebraska.”

<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/nu-team-earns-top-10-finish-in-pandemic-response-challenge/>

PLANNERS BOOK CLUB - SUMMER SELECTION

Join your fellow planners and allied professionals in the Summer 2021 Planners Book Club hosted by the APA Nebraska Chapter's Emerging Planners Group. Here is how it works:

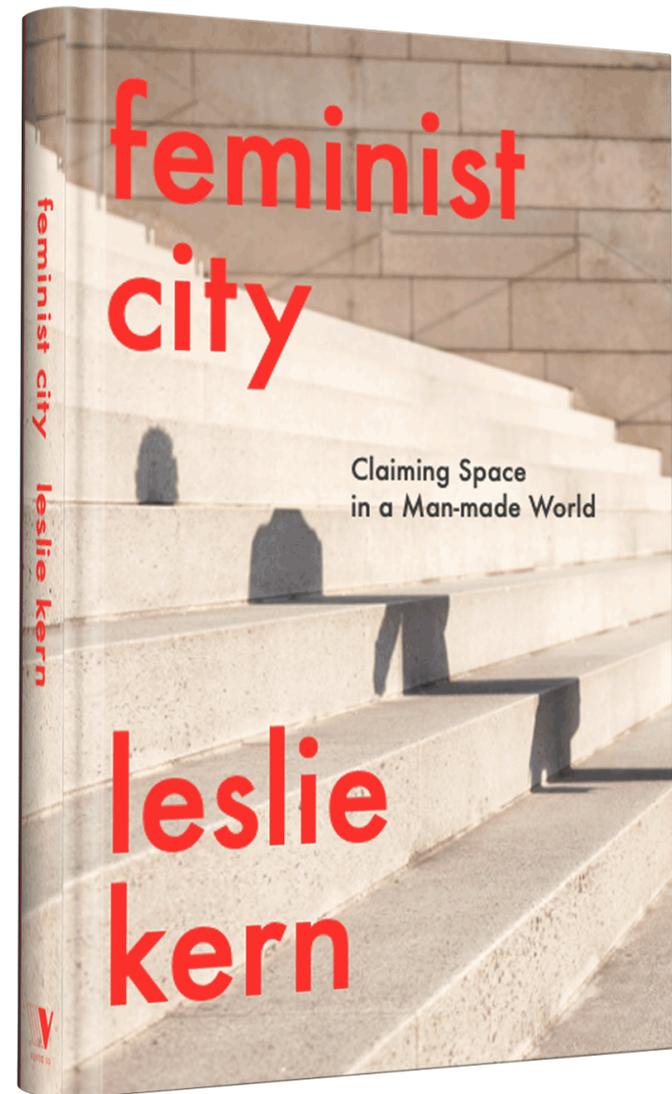
1. Register to participate at the following link: <https://forms.gle/Eu9K445P9gUqiTFUA>.
2. Read or listen to the book (available in physical, digital, and audio formats).
3. Join us for a lively discussion in June. A Doodle poll will be sent out to book club participants several weeks in advance to find a time that works for everyone for the discussion. To be determined whether or not the discussion will be held in person or over Zoom.
4. Earn CM credit for participating in the discussion.

Book Selection: *Feminist City* by Leslie Kern

Synopsis by the publisher, Verso Books:

Feminist City is an ongoing experiment in living differently, living better, and living more justly in an urban world. We live in the city of men. Our public spaces are not designed for female bodies. There is little consideration for women as mothers, workers or carers. The urban streets often are a place of threats rather than community. Gentrification has made the everyday lives of women even more difficult. What would a metropolis for working women look like? A city of friendships beyond Sex and the City. A transit system that accommodates mothers with strollers on the school run. A public space with enough toilets. A place where women can walk without harassment.

In *Feminist City*, through history, personal experience and popular culture Leslie Kern exposes what is hidden in plain sight: the social inequalities built into our cities, homes, and neighborhoods. Kern offers an alternative vision of the feminist city. Taking on fear, motherhood, friendship, activism, and the joys and perils of being alone, Kern maps the city from new vantage points, laying out an intersectional feminist approach to urban histories and proposes that the city is perhaps also our best hope for shaping a new urban future. It is time to dismantle what we take for granted about cities and to ask how we can build more just, sustainable, and women-friendly cities together.



JOB POSTINGS

Looking to hire? Send us your posting! Email rouseplanning@gmail.com with a short description and link to the job posting.

RDG PLANNING & DESIGN

RDG Planning & Design is seeking candidates for an Urban Planner position in RDG's Omaha or Des Moines office. For more information and to apply, please visit: <https://rdgusa.com/urban-planner>.

FOR MORE JOB POSTINGS VISIT:

- » <https://npza.org/resources/careers>
- » www.iowa-apa.org/resources/job-postings
- » <https://www.lonm.org/classifieds/careers.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS

A NEW APPROACH TO PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM PLANNING

April 16, 2021 12 PM CDT. CM | 1.5

Register: <http://smartgrowth.org/a-new-approach-to-parks-and-recreation-system-planning/>

DESIGN THINKING - UTILIZING HAND GRAPHICS TO EXPLORE IDEAS

April 16, 2021 | 1:00 - 2:30 PM ET

CM #9214000

Sponsored by: Urban Design and Preservation Division

Register: http://www.ohioplanning.org/aws/APAOH/pt/sp/webcast_home_page

PLANNING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE: FROM AGING INFRASTRUCTURE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

April 30, 2021 | 1:00 - 2:30 PM ET

CM #9214033

Sponsored by: HMDR Division

Register: http://www.ohioplanning.org/aws/APAOH/pt/sp/webcast_home_page

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- Andrew Conzett, AIA – Allied Professionals Liaison
- Anna Headlee – Student Planning Association of Nebraska (SPAN) Liaison
- Zhenghong Tang, Ph.D. – UNL Planning Faculty Liaison

APA NE Subcommittees

- Legislative: David Levy; Amy Haase, AICP
- Membership Recruitment & Appreciation: Paul Barnes, AICP
- Emerging Planners Group: Cale Brodersen, AICP Candidate
- Conference/Workshop: Keith Marvin, AICP; Stacey Hageman; Jeff Ray, AICP; Bruce Fountain, AICP
- Mentorship/Student Outreach: Cale Brodersen, AICP Candidate; Zhenghong Tang, Ph.D.
- Allied Professional Collaborations: Andrew Conzett, AIA
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- Zoning Administrator Certification Committee – David Ptak
- Nebraska Planning Handbook Committee – Rashad Moxey

Submit Your Content!

The NE Planner welcomes readers and associates to submit articles for publication within the newsletter. We are also happy to include RFP/RFQ's, new job postings, and upcoming events. Email rouseplanning@gmail.com to be included in the next Newsletter.