

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PLANNING

APA

American Planning Association
Sustainable Communities Division

Making Great Communities Happen

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Welcome from the Division Chair

By Daniel Lerch

Why does the APA need a Sustainable Communities Division? We've asked (and been asked) that question many times since we first proposed the idea in 2007.

Back then, our answer was simple: we felt the planning profession was not giving sustainability issues the serious attention and focus they needed. The U.S. Green Building Council had been aggressively pushing low-energy building standards in the private sector for years, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors and ICLEI were making waves with aggressive climate mitigation efforts. Planners, meanwhile, seemed to have little to offer of relevance beyond years-old growth management tools and a slowly growing collection of innovative but outlier practices from places like San Francisco and Portland.

In retrospect, the national conversation on sustainability at that time was in the midst of its biggest turning point since the early 1990s. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006 had started to shift public thinking on climate change, while the build-up to what would become the oil price spike of 2008 (and the end of cheap oil generally) was prompting many people to rethink their assumptions about energy. Planners' thinking and planning practice were also at a turning point; there was certainly no lack of interesting projects and innovative policies at the time for anyone looking. But the conversation about sustainability within our profession remained uncentered and diffuse, and a sustainability-focused Division seemed like a constructive way to address that.

Things in the planning profession have changed quickly and dramatically since then. Communities and planners across the country now regularly deal with sustainability concerns. Within APA, we've gone from a 2007 conference in Philadelphia where the sessions dealing with climate change issues could quite literally be counted on one hand, to last year's conference in Los Angeles bursting at the seams with sustainability issues (and, not coincidentally, new young planners). We've seen the release of important new reports like "Planning for a New Energy and Climate Future" from the Green Communities Research Center and "Sustaining Places: The Role of the Comprehensive Plan" through the Sustaining Places Initiative. Some Chapters and Divisions have started committees and projects on sustainability issues.

But until now, we've still missed a critical component: a place within our national professional body where those of us who want to tackle the world's deep sustainability challenges through planning can connect directly with our peers to discuss, organize, and collaborate. **That's what this new Sustainable Communities Division is all about.** And in this—our very first newsletter—you can already see some of the benefits, like fostering information-sharing and collaboration between APA State Chapters, and highlighting some innovative projects you may not have heard about.

We've done the hard work of getting this Division up and running. Now we need **you** to get involved with the exciting part: working with your peers to push sustainability thinking to the forefront of the planning profession. Please visit our blog at sustainableplanning.net for the latest news and links to our discussion forum, and help us start this important work.

Thanks for being a member,



Daniel Lerch
Chair, APA Sustainable Communities Division

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Spring 2013

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National Conference Session Presents Sustainability Practices for Planners

By Carine Arendes

Visionary long range plans set high aspirations for communities, but without concrete, achievable actions to get there, those visions may be difficult to realize. Even when communities adopt sustainability, climate change, green building, or energy efficiency policies, jurisdictions may lack the resources to meet policy goals or the rules and regulations that govern daily practice, and may actually create impediments to achieving those aspirations. At the APA National Conference in Chicago, the Best Practices in Sustainable Community Planning session will present case studies from both the East and West Coasts that deal with these challenges. Session experts will share how planners and policy makers across the nation have used concrete sustainable development strategies to make changes in the way development is implemented.

Evaluating Land Use Controls

One recent trend in practice is to evaluate the regulatory land use framework through a sustainability lens (frequently LEED-ND), identify barriers to sustainable development, and then take action to reduce those barriers. In 2012, the City of Mount Vernon, New York, embarked on a project to develop a targeted Green Mixed-Use District Ordinance. The intent is to spur sustainable, mixed-use development along a commercial corridor while increasing the capacity and reducing the costs of using energy-efficient designs and technologies and renewable energy systems in projects in the zone. The City analyzed the proposed mixed-use zoning district ordinance using the Technical Guidance Manual for Sustainable Neighborhoods to identify possible adjustments for further incentivizing and eliminating barriers to sustainable development. Meg Byerly, Staff Attorney for the Land Use Law Center at Pace Law School will talk at the conference session about how the Manual was used and the expected outcome if the resulting ordinance is implemented by the City.

The desert city of Las Vegas might not be the first West Coast city you think of regarding sustainability, yet the Las Vegas Planning and Development Department recently completed an audit of the city's zoning code based on LEED-ND standards. The resulting report identified code barriers to sustainability and proposed numerous changes to the zoning code. Recommended policy changes call for adaptive reuse of historic buildings, post-construction best management practices for site plans, and a more diverse range of building materials and alternative roofing methods. Additionally, the report recommended changes in standards allowing greater building heights for green buildings, providing greater flexibility in solar panel regulations, amending parking standards to encourage alternative transportation, reducing impervious surfaces, minimizing parking, and

requiring more landscaping. Flinn Fagg, Deputy Director of Planning & Development for the City of Las Vegas will explain the code audit process that can be utilized in other communities.

Providing Resources to Implementers

Another approach is to create a library of online sustainability resources including incentives, voluntary programs, case studies, and model ordinances for implementers. Jersey City, just across the river from New York City, was an industrial center and destination for immigrants in both the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, it is the second most populous city in New Jersey and is known both for its cultural diversity and its high number of resident artists. The Jersey City Redevelopment Agency (JCRA) was motivated to encourage developers in the City's designated redevelopment areas to incorporate sustainability measures into their redevelopment agreements in 2011. After researching best practice models, the JCRA's consultant developed a guidance document that would incentivize sustainable growth with standards targeted for each redevelopment area. Now they are in the process of turning those standards into a comprehensive rating system. Elizabeth McManus, associate planner at Clarke Caton Hintz, will share insights from Jersey City's process that may be replicable in communities across the country.

It's not just cities that play a role in developing tools to help implement sustainable development. Sustainable Jersey is a third-party certification for municipalities in New Jersey developed by the New Jersey State League of Municipalities in partnership with the Municipal Land Use Center of The College of New Jersey. Sustainable Jersey developed a "menu of actions" that municipalities can take to earn points toward certification. The standards, incentives, and measures are developed through policy coordination with local governments, state agencies, universities, businesses, non-profit organizations, community stakeholders, and experts. The actions measure and address municipal performance in areas of energy efficiency, operations and maintenance, historic preservation, community outreach, diversity and equity, health and wellness, green design, land use, transportation, and waste management. Randall Solomon, Co-Director of The Sustainability Institute at The College of New Jersey will discuss a new tool developed for Sustainable Jersey, the Sustainable Land Use Self-Assessment Toolkit.

In Chicago

The Best Practices in Sustainable Community Planning session will provide attendees with more information on using the tools described in the case studies. The City of

EVENTS OF INTEREST

ACI 2013 National Home Performance Conference; Denver, CO: April 29 - May 3, 2013

The 2013 Affordable Comfort, Inc (ACI) National Home Performance Conference and the ACI Home Energy Leadership Summit will be co-located and held consecutively in Denver, Colorado. These events bring together thousands of dedicated professionals nationwide in the home performance and weatherization industry.

<http://www.affordablecomfort.org/events>

IEEE-USA 2013; Portland, OR: August 1-4, 2013

Thursday and Friday's programs will feature the inaugural Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Conference on Technologies for Sustainability with both academic and application-oriented presentations.

<http://sites.ieee.org/ieeeeusa2013>

The 2nd International Conference on Biodiversity & Sustainable Energy Development; Raleigh, NC: August 12-14, 2013

This conference provides a platform for scientists, engineers, directors of companies and students in the field of Biodiversity to meet and share their knowledge.

<http://www.omicsgroup.com/conferences/biodiversity-sustainable-energy-development-2013/>

GreenTown Michiana; South Bend, IN: October 10-11, 2013

Attend GreenTown Thursday, October 11 and Friday, October 12, learn from been-there case studies with local, regional and national experts. Join the drive to create a healthier, more prosperous and sustainable community.

<http://www.greentownconference.com>

AASHE Conference and Expo: Resilience and Adaptation; Nashville, TN: October 6-9, 2013

America's largest higher education sustainability conference is going to be held in Nashville, Tennessee.

<http://conference.aashe.org>

AIA South Atlantic Region Conference 2013, Reinvent Architecture; Atlanta, GA: Date Pending

Participants can engage in a total of six seminar courses having specific relevance within areas of sustainable design while achieving GBCI credits. This year's conference theme RE: inventing Architecture calls upon architects and allied professionals to seek new methods, strategies, and purposes within the realm of architecture.

<http://new.usgbc.org/courses/aia-south-atlantic-region-conference-2013-reinvent-architecture>

Mount Vernon and the City of Las Vegas both utilized the Technical Guidance Manual for Sustainable Neighborhoods and the Local Government Guide to LEED. The Green Re-development Guide adopted by Jersey City Redevelopment Agency provides an inventory of sustainability and green building programs impacting Jersey City's Redevelopment Areas including programs and resources for businesses, developers, property owners, and renters. Sustainable Jersey's Municipal Planning and Zoning Assessment will guide local communities through a review of their local master plans, zoning codes, and related regulations to determine if they are supportive of sustainable growth.

Development implementation is a critical component of sustainable community planning, and planners play a strategic role. Understanding the changing world of sustainability practice and techniques is effective leverage that planners of all kinds can use to change regulations, develop incentives, and implement sustainable community change. Join us at

the Chicago conference and add four new sustainability tools to your toolbox.

Links to Further Resources

- » [Technical Guidance Manual for Sustainable Neighborhoods](#)
- » [Local Government Guide to LEED - US Green Building Council](#)
- » [Sustainable Jersey](#)
- » [The Jersey City Redevelopment Agency's Green Redevelopment Guide](#)
- » [Greening the Code](#)

Carine Arendes, an assistant planner for Portland State University completing her Masters of Urban and Regional Planning degree, assisted with the Sustainable Communities Division conference session proposal selection. While Oregon's Washington County she worked on the "Greening the Code" project, which utilized a code audit approach to develop recommendations for reducing regulatory barriers to desirable sustainable development.

The Challenge of Sustainability Planning

State APA Chapters and the New APA Sustainable Communities Division

By Scott T. Edmondson

This past July, a serendipitous phone call led to collaboration between the APA Colorado and APA California Northern Section sustainability committees generating the following questions. How do other state APA chapters address society's sustainability challenge? What role can the new APA Sustainable Communities Division play? The phone call ended with an informal research project to begin addressing those questions. That project led to this article and the new Division's Facilitated Discussion session at the upcoming 2013 National APA Conference, Mobilizing Sustainability (3-4:15 pm, Sunday April 14). The session will explore the role that state APA chapters and the new APA Sustainable Communities Division can play in addressing sustainability.

With generous research assistance from the APA Colorado Sustainability Committee,¹ the research team collected information on sustainability initiatives by reviewing the websites of 63 state-level public planning professional organizations and sending email queries to 58 presidents (some states have multiple sections; are part of larger, multi-state collaborations; or have independent, non-APA professional organizations; hereafter referred to as APA state chapters for ease of reference). Researchers received 35 responses. This article summarizes the variety of issues that state chapters face, how they address them, and the implications

for enhancing the efforts. You can join the Division's online discussion on this topic at <http://linkd.in/scd-chaps>.

Findings

Initially, the research team expected to find many active state APA sustainability committees in light of the "mainstreaming" of sustainability over the past five years, National APA leadership on the topic,² and the increasing urgency for an effective response. This section describes the research findings on state chapter initiatives, which clustered as follows: (1) no committee, but interest and activity; (2) requests for information, (3) reasons for not having a committee; and (4) sustainability committees.

No Committees

Twenty-five state chapters with no explicit sustainability committee expressed interest, support for the topic, or they promoted sustainability-related activities including the following.

- » Climate change and sea level rise (Delaware).
- » Promoting sustainable development practices (Louisiana).
- » Public health and the built environment (Minnesota).
- » HUD Sustainability Planning Grant for integrating housing, transportation, and employment in the region (Mississippi).

- » Sustainability toolkits and collaboration (Oregon and Washington).
- » Climate action plans (Tennessee).
- » Energy efficiency (Arizona).
- » Regional transportation and sustainability issues (National Capital Area).
- » Health and planning (California-Inland Empire Section).
- » Eco-municipalities and smart growth (Wisconsin).

Four state chapters expressed interest in additional information, as follows.

- » Best practices (Kentucky).
- » Sustainability committee goals and objectives (Georgia).
- » Sustainability committee work programs (Arizona).
- » Information useful for starting a sustainability committee (Mississippi).

The state chapters without sustainability committees had the following explanations.

- » Have functional but not issue-based committees.
- » Absence of sufficient interest to lead a committee.
- » Anti-sustainability planning sentiment in the community.
- » Address the issue when interest arises.
- » Pursue the topic through other functional committees, collaborations, or opportunities, but not through a dedicated committee.
- » Already built into the chapter’s mission and strategic plan.
- » Handled better locally, not at the state level.
- » Insufficient chapter capacity to address the topic in any manner.
- » Need to develop more chapter capacity before taking on other initiatives.
- » No public or local professional call to address sustainability on a statewide basis.
- » Conflicts of interest often arise when multi-jurisdiction chapters address issues or try to form issue-based committees.

Sustainability Committees

Five state chapters have sustainability committees. They represent a range of approaches and work plans that may be

useful to other chapters considering a more formal initiative. The five chapters are California-Northern, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

Three other state chapters have similar efforts focused on sustainability. One member of the Utah Executive Committee leads their Green Committee, which addresses environmental and sustainability issues and is developing a web page of resources. Neither Oregon nor Washington has separate sustainability committees, but their sustainability initiatives are extensive and long-standing. Washington APA addresses sustainability through the lens of [climate change](#), the [Growth Management Act](#), and [Livable Washington](#). The Oregon APA’s sustainability work includes development of an extensive [sustainability toolkit](#) for Oregon planners that other planners may find useful. The Chapter collaborates

E N E R G Y

California City Wants to Require Solar on Every New Home: *Mayor Rex Parris of Lancaster, CA announced in March that his city will institute a first-of-its-kind requirement that solar be installed on every new single-family home built after January 1, 2014. The new law will be written into Lancaster’s “Residential Zones Update” on residential solar. Along with a range of green building provisions, it specifies that new single family homes meet minimum solar system requirements. Residential homes on lots from 7,000 square feet must have a solar system of 1.0 kilowatt to 1.5 kilowatts. Rural residential homes of up to 100,000 square feet must have a system of at least 1.5 kilowatts.*

<http://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/read/lan-caster-to-require-solar-on-every-new-home>



Photo © Ken White

with Washington APA on their “[Game Changing Initiatives](#),” which are not focused exclusively on “sustainability” but includes those principles. The Chapter promotes “sustainable development . . . through comprehensive planning for economic development, social and environmental objectives.” In addition, the Chapter’s 2010-2015 [strategic plan](#) identifies sustainability as a primary planning challenge, with the biggest challenge being the integration of sustainability principles and concepts into the state program and into planning practice generally.

Committee summaries follow below in alphabetical order by state.



APA CA-Northern (2010). The Sustainability Committee’s mission is to “create a learning-practice network that advances effective sustainability planning in the Northern Section.” The

Committee enhances understanding and practice by illuminating leading edge and strategic sustainability³ frameworks, initiatives, and planning cases. Such approaches catalyze planning innovation to achieve net-zero and restorative environmental impacts, economic prosperity, and vibrant livable communities.^{4,5} The Committee pursues this mission in four ways: (1) publishing a regular newsletter column (“Plan-it sustainably”), a bimonthly E-Update, a blog, articles, guides, reports, and a web site; (2) holding workshops to deepen dialogue, training, and collaboration, and offering AICP Professional Certification Maintenance credit; (3) conducting research to advance practice in collaboration with local universities and firms; and (4) catalyzing planning innovation to support the shift to regenerative planning (practice, regulations, and legislation).



APA Colorado (2009). The Sustainability Committee’s mission is to “promote the integration of sustainability principles into planning policy and practice.” The Sustainability Committee pursues a work program of education and outreach. It meets monthly, plans trainings and events, assists with state conference greening; identifies and promotes best practices; collaborates with other organizations; and engages Colorado APA membership. The Committee works with the Legislative Committee to promote policy recommendations that support sustainability planning. They share innovative methods and foster dialog. They publish articles and promote events regularly in the Chapter’s newsletter. The Committee holds seminars with CM credit throughout the year and at the State Conference. The Chapter website

provides links to resources and displays volunteer opportunities.



APA Florida (2012). The Sustainability Committee completed start-up tasks in 2012, such as defining sustainability and establishing committee objectives. They found each committee member had different ideas about sustainability that took time to reconcile. They also found that defining an arena of focus is particularly challenging because sustainability planning is such an all-encompassing subject. The Committee has ambitious plans to provide extensive web-based sustainability planning resources. Their committee developed the following objectives:⁶ (1) create a consistent message (theme, definition) of sustainability for community planning in Florida; (2) provide advice and direction to the Chapter’s Executive Committee and Legislative Policy Committee on sustainability initiatives and efforts; (3) identify other existing sustainability efforts, and as appropriate, find ways to coordinate, complement, and not duplicate their efforts; (4) provide resources on sustainability and sustainable planning practices to planners through the Chapter’s web site; (5) identify and highlight the role of planners in sustainability and building sustainable communities; and (6) provide a forum for discussion about sustainability for the profession and others.



APA Massachusetts (2004). The Sustainability Committee works towards the following three objectives: (1) providing a forum for professionals, students, and other interested parties involved with sustainability to discuss planning issues; (2) increasing fellowship among committee members through the exchange of information and ideas; and (3) increasing planners’ knowledge of the growing sustainable development practice throughout all aspects of land use planning within Massachusetts.



APA New Jersey. The Sustainability Committee promotes planning that creates sustainable, green, energy efficient communities at all levels of government. This type of planning creates strong relationships between buildings, land use, housing, all modes of transportation, and the environment to improve energy efficiency and reduce environmental impacts. The Committee promotes livable communities through community education, public charrettes, and facilitating inter-organizational initiatives. The Committee reviews, comments, and proposes legislation and policies that promote eco-friendly community design and a holistic

approach to increase the use of best sustainable planning practices and community livability models and tools.

Assessment

This section assesses the findings presented above to illuminate the primary challenges that state chapters face in responding to society's sustainability challenge.⁷ The explanations for not having a dedicated sustainability committee suggest that some state chapters may have insufficient capacity, may not perceive a relevant role, or in some cases face public opposition to the topic. The range of explanations and the four types of requested information (best practices, goals and objectives, work programs, and start-up information) indicate high-priority needs of any state APA chapter interested in exploring and embracing the sustainability challenge. The requested information on "goals and objectives" raises the larger issues of purpose and definition related to advancing society's sustainability response, while that on "work program" raises the general issues of methods and roles related to mounting an effective sustainability response.

The issue-based initiatives that state chapters pursue and the work programs of sustainability committees illustrate the different ways that chapters presently define and respond to the sustainability challenge. These different approaches reflect many different definitions of the sustainability challenge. Like all definitions and approaches, they vary in their effectiveness. For the purposes of this article, one useful way of understanding this variation is by examining three general approaches to sustainability: (1) conservation and environmentalism (habitat, resources, and energy conservation); (2) planning (smart growth, livable places, and healthy cities); and (3) regenerative design and planning using the end-game performance parameters of net-zero/restorative impacts to drive needed innovation (Eco-Municipalities, Eco-Districts, Living Building/City Challenge, Integrated Community Sustainability Planning, One Planet Framework).

Initiatives using either of the first two approaches tend to be tactical and issue-based while those using the third approach are anchored in ecosystem principles and typically have a strategic, end-game focus. The first two typically respond with per-unit environmental impact mitigation, such as a 15% reduction in GHG emissions per vehicle, which simply slows the rate of ultimate damage. In contrast, the third embraces the full challenge. It focuses on achieving the end game of sustainability success with at least net-zero—if not net-positive—restorative impacts. This approach addresses the root economic "source" of

the sustainability challenge. It "re-couples" our economy and environment in ways that eliminate environmental damage and enhance the economy, thereby establishing the basis for durable prosperity. This approach is not a "silver bullet," but by embracing the whole challenge from the beginning, it motivates the required innovation and magnitude of response needed for success.

Thus, in addition to the relatively "normal" organizational challenges of mounting an organized response to a planning need, such as capacity and best practices noted above, there is the additional challenge for state chapters that want to embrace the sustainability challenge further of identifying an effective response when that response is still a work in progress.

Enhancing the Response

This section explores ways that state chapters and the new Division could enhance state chapter sustainability initiatives in light of the challenges discussed above in the "Findings" and "Assessment" subsections. This initial research suggests a varied state chapter response to the sustainability challenge, which probably reflects society's present understanding of the challenge and comfort zone for responding. It is difficult for planning practice to get too far ahead of society. It also reflects sustainability's unusually difficult methodological, technical, and leadership challenge. However, compared to conditions created by accelerating socioeconomic and environmental

(continued on page 10...)

CLIMATE CHANGE

David Roberts TEDx Talk on Climate Change is Amped for the Age: *Back in April 2012, David Roberts, lead writer on energy and climate for Grist.org, presented at a TEDx event called "Hello Climate Change: Rethinking the Unthinkable." His presentation was titled "Climate change is simple" and consisted of simple-to-understand explanations regarding the threat and consequences of climate change. Subsequent to that speech, Ryan Louis Cooper, a journalist and social media manager for Washington Monthly, combined the original speech with music, imagery, and video to create a unique and powerful 15 minute video well worth checking out.*

<http://grist.org/climate-energy/my-tedx-talk-on-climate-pimped-out/>

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS DIVISION HAPPEN!

History

The APA Sustainable Communities Division was officially launched in Fall 2012, but its roots go back at least to 2000 when a group including **Sarah James, Steve Preston, Ralph Wilmer, Peter Lowitt, and Gary Peterson** collaborated on APA's [Planning for Sustainability Policy Guide](#). The effort that culminated in this Division started at the 2007 APA national conference in Philadelphia, with **Sharon Ferguson** walking room to room collecting over 600 signatures supporting the establishment of a new APA Sustainability Division. She and **Daniel Lerch** developed and submitted a [formal proposal](#) to the APA to form the Division, which in part read: "Planners are uniquely qualified to assume a leadership role in confronting and solving the evolving uncertainties that humanity faces. This is too great a topic of interest and concern not to be a significant part of the APA. A division solely devoted to this topic is sorely needed and is, frankly, overdue."

Because APA required prospective Divisions to first show their staying power as an informal group, Sharon and Daniel formed a coordinating committee with Sarah, Ralph, Peter from the 2000 policy guide group, plus **Angela Vincent, Carol Barrett, Joyce Allgaier, and Aaron Tuley** to run the APA Sustainable Community Planning Interest Group (APA-SCP). With the help of the inimitable **Kelley Roy**, in 2010 APA-SCP held a boisterous launch party at Lucy's Retired Surfers Bar & Restaurant during the national conference in New Orleans. We quickly collected over 1,000 people on our mailing list, and started building a presence [online](#) and within the APA. In 2011 at the national conference in Boston we showcased model communities and hosted APA President Bruce Knight at our even more-boisterous-than-the-previous-year party at the Cactus Club. More folks got involved with our activities, including **Debbie Lawlor, Rob Kerns, Ben Herman, Mike Davidson, Ramona Mullahey, Kevin Fletcher, Christopher Ryan, and Nathan Storey**.

As we expanded our membership, as well as our engagement with APA projects like the Sustaining Places Task Force, it became clear that we'd need a more formal structure and program in order to be effective. At the 2012 national conference in Los Angeles we held a focused reception and strategizing session, identifying specific key projects people wanted to work on. Soon after we learned that APA was ready for us to re-apply to be a Division, so we formed a transitional Steering Committee with **Daniel, Angela, Ben, Rob, Ramona, Michael, Debra March, Mark Teschauer, and Clark Henry**. APA formally announced us as their twentieth Division in late 2012; within a matter of months, well over 200 Founding Members joined, and a small army of volunteers (sidebar, page 2) started working on the next chapter of our story.

Past Sponsors

We are very grateful to all the sponsors who have supported us both financially and strategically since our start in 2010. This project would have faltered many times without their involvement. Our past sponsors include: Clarion Associates, WRT, Farr Associates, SRA, ENE, Placematters, Fregonese Associates, Criterion Associates, Audubon International, Duncan Associates, The Natural Step — USA, George Washington University Master of Sustainable Planning program, Greener Futures, the U.S. Green Building Council, metapattern, Data Driven Planning, Mullahey & Mullahey, Sustainability2030, Brendle Group, and Post Carbon Institute.

We are especially grateful to **Chris Duerksen and Ben Herman of Clarion Associates, Dave Rouse and Rob Kerns of WRT, Doug Farr of Farr Associates, Kate Marshall of SRA, and Gerry Gallagher of ENE** for being repeat sponsors year after year. Your consistent financial support has given us a much-needed foundation, but it's your time, advice, and ideas have been truly invaluable, and are what have kept this effort moving forward through often uncertain waters. **Thank you!**

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS DIVISION HAPPEN!

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Kara Drane	Brian James	Nancy Mcherson	Jeremy Rothwell	Belinda Wordlaw
Christopher Duerksen	Sarah James	Justin Meek	Christopher Ryan	Janet Wright
Robert Duffy	Colleen Johnson	Douglas Melnick	Rana Salzmann	Peter Young
Robyn Eason	Madelyn Johnson	Anne Miller	Brenda Scheer	John Zeanah

(continued from page 7...)

trends, these findings reveal a gap between the current and needed sustainability response. Bridging the gap becomes the challenge, the measure of success, and the method for motivating the needed level of creativity and effort. How to bridge the gap becomes the challenge to state APA chapters who want to enhance their sustainability initiatives or start or expand a sustainability committee.

The assessment in the preceding section suggests that state chapters face the following challenges when addressing sustainability.

1. Capacity and resources.
2. Leadership and education.
3. Constructively engaged public.
4. Best-practices tools.

5. Committee start-up information, including sample goals, objectives, and work programs.
6. A clear strategic framework to use in identifying effective approaches and moving towards the end game of sustainability success.

State APA chapters and the new Division can meet these needs with standard information, education, and training services, possibly in partnership with National APA. In addition, creating a national collaborative learning/practice sustainability planning network can increase the speed of learning, innovation, and effectiveness.

However, formulating the content for these programs raises the critical question of the preceding section: of the many possibilities, which approaches are effective and how are they identified? Does society and planning simply need to do more of what it already does (business as usual), faster, more extensively, or better? If so, expanding the use of best practices may be sufficient. Alternatively, do society and planning need to do something fundamentally different—in other words, “outside-the-box” innovation? If so, then the needed understanding and responses may not yet exist, “best practices” may be inadequate for the larger goal, and taking an experimental approach may be a necessary part of the response.

How do we proceed under these conditions of uncertainty? One option is “best practices+,” where the “+” stands for on-going innovation, invention, and experimentation until we achieve sustainability success. This predicament leaves state chapters, the new Division, the profession, and individual planners, with one additional challenge (to add to the six identified above):

“7. Routine innovation.”

How can we design the innovation methodology needed to achieve sustainability success, and then incorporate it into our planning practices and societal institutions?⁸ Fortunately, the profession already has core expertise in integrative planning and design methodology that it can harness to the task. In addition, the profession already has promising initiatives in the newly coalescing arena of “regenerative” design, planning, and development with its endgame focus on net-zero/restorative impacts.⁹ The challenge will be institutionalizing innovation.

These initiatives have deep roots in the long-standing “ecological design” tradition of planning and sustainable development.¹⁰ Therefore, they are a natural starting point for state chapters and the new Division in develop-

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Austin implements curbside composting: *In January 2013, the City of Austin, Texas initiated a pilot curbside organics collection program for 7,900 residential customers. The program is overseen by Austin Resource Recovery, the city department tasked with overseeing composting, recycling, and resource management. The pilot program expands upon existing citywide collection of yard trimmings by adding collection of food scraps and soiled paper. At the initiation of the program, Austin Resource Recovery Director Bob Gedert estimated that almost half of landfilled materials could have been composted. “Collecting organic materials at the curb will keep valuable materials out of our landfills, reduce harmful greenhouse gases and help Austin get closer to Zero Waste.” The Department’s goal is to reach zero waste by 2040 (reducing the amount of trash sent to landfills by 90 percent). To support the new initiative, the City is providing free composting classes, home composting system rebates of up to \$75, new composting carts, and indoor food scrap receptacles.*

<http://www.austintexas.gov/news/city-launches-curb-side-organics-collection-pilot-program>

ing content for the information, education, and training services that would be developed to address the needs (1-7) summarized above. Doing so would require critically evaluating leading-edge sustainability planning (definitions, assumptions, strategies, process, methods, content, tools) for their transferable value. However, this additional need for on-going innovation in routine planning practice as a requirement for effective sustainability planning may involve additional research and development initiatives.¹¹ This is another arena of activity and support that state APA chapters and the new Division, in concert with National APA could undertake.

Conclusion

A fitting thought for our profession as we embrace the sustainability challenge is the adage, “the best way to predict the future is to create it.” Architect William McDonough extends this idea when he says, “Being less bad is *not* being good!” That reframing illuminates the fundamental shift of approach that now challenges the planning profession and society more widely. Orchestrating this shift, at individual through institutional levels, is our 21st century challenge.

Invitation

In light of the informal research results discussed above, what are your ideas about (1) the nature of the sustainability planning challenge and the role of state APA chapters and the new APA Sustainable Communities Division in addressing it; and (2) designing the new roles and practices to further develop the approach and capacity needed to respond effectively to the sustainability challenge? The Division invites you to participate in the collaborative response to these central questions through its online discussion on this

topic at <http://linkd.in/scd-chaps>, its facilitated discussion session at the 2013 National APA Conference in Chicago (Mobilizing Sustainability, 3-4:15 pm, Sunday, April 14), and the Division’s on-going dialogue and work program.

Scott T. Edmondson, AICP, is a Strategic Sustainability Planner-Economist with the San Francisco Planning Department, a member of the new APA Sustainable Communities Division, founder/member/past co-director of the APA California Chapter Northern Sustainability Committee, and founder/principal of Strategic Sustainability Institute 2030. The views expressed in this article are his alone. The review and comment team consisting of Carine Arendes, Clark Henry, Daniel Lerch, Anne Miller, and Marie Summers provided valuable insights.

Notes

1. Caitlyn Horose and Carrie Murphy.
2. See the National APA [Sustaining Places Initiative](#) and the [position paper](#) on reinventing planning for sustainability.
3. The Natural Step is one rich source of resources and experience in [strategic sustainability \(summary of approach; and Guide\)](#).
4. Examples of noteworthy initiatives include [Eco-municipalities](#), [The Living Building/City/Future Challenge](#), [Eco-Districts](#), [Eco-Cities](#), [Integrated Community Sustainability Planning \(Canada; The Guide\)](#), and the [One Planet Living](#) framework. There are many other important focused initiatives that would fit into these overarching frameworks, such as [Architecture2030](#) and their [2030 Challenge for Planning](#) (and existing buildings). See also, Beatley, *Green Cities of Europe*, Island Press, 2012.
5. See Alex Steffen ([Worldchanging.com](#)), TED Talks, (1) [The shareable future of cities](#), and (2) [The route to a sustainable future](#).
6. APA Florida Sustainability Committee Meeting Notes, April 30, 2012, Merle Bishop.
7. Although there are many definitions of society’s sustainability challenge, the key concept is the threat that human activity is compromising the capacity of the biosphere, as earth’s regenerative life support system, to continue supporting life on the planet. Five primary sources characterizing this challenge and response options in detail are the following: *Beyond the Limits (Meadows and Randers)*; *Plan B 4.0 (Brown)*; *Common Wealth (Sachs)*; *Hot, Flat, and Crowded (Friedman)*; and *The Post Carbon Reader (Post Carbon Institute)*. In addition, the APA has codified a definition and approach for the planning profession in its *Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability*.
8. Business has been making innovation routine for the past 20+ years and it likely has transferable value for planning and communities. See [Interface Corporation](#) for one longstanding and noteworthy example with some transferable potential. This theme of innovation for sustainability planning and communities could be the basis for a conference, workshops, or APA research program.
9. See note number 8.
10. See article by Edward J. Jepson, Jr., Ph.D., AICP, Dr. Jepson, “How Possible is Sustainable Urban Development,” *Planning Practice & Research*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 417–437, August 2010). See also, Beatley, *Green Cities of Europe*, Island Press, 2012.
11. This requirement for creating and institutionalizing the capacity for on-going innovation is part of a larger challenge: creating learning organizations, institutions, and societies with the capacity to meet the complexities of sustainability. See [Peter Senge](#), a leader in this field for many years, and his book, *The Necessary Revolution*, which summarizes his consulting experience with global businesses and communities in forging this new learning capacity of innovation for sustainability.

APA Sustainability Objectives Are Guiding Policy for Municipalities

By Sarah James

Close to 30 cities, towns, and county governments have officially adopted the four sustainability objectives of the American Planning Association’s *Planning for Sustainability Policy Guide (2000)* as their municipal policy for achieving community sustainability.

Ashland, Bayfield, and Washburn in Northwest Wisconsin became the first US communities to do so in 2005 when their City Councils passed official resolutions adopting these objectives. In the years that followed, more than 25 other municipalities in Wisconsin and beyond followed their example and have been busy turning the sustainability objectives into action. Madison, WI; Duluth, MN;



City Councilor Mary Rehwald and U. of WI Ext.'s Jane Silberstein started the Chequamegon Bay Eco-Region Initiative

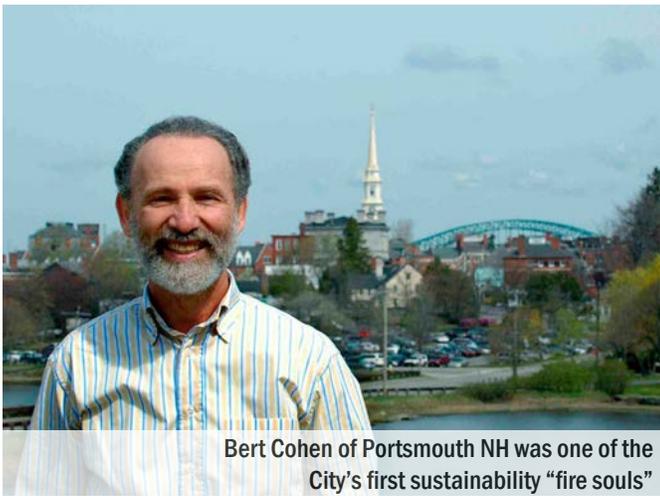
Photo courtesy Sarah James

Portsmouth, NH; and most recently, Concord, MA (the birthplace of American independence) are among these.

The Chequamegon Bay Eco-Region Initiative

In 2005, an Ashland City Councilor and a University of Wisconsin-Extension educator began the sustainability movement that led to regional adoption and use of the APA sustainability objectives. Since 2005, the Wisconsin communities of Ashland, Bayfield, and Washburn have been joined by two neighboring municipalities and two Native American tribes in adoption of the APA objectives to form the Chequamegon Bay eco-region initiative. These five communities and two tribal nations have cooperatively developed a regional sustainability plan that is overseen by the Alliance for Sustainability, a non-profit organization made up of citizens, businesses, and officials from the entire region. Currently, key activities are local organic food production and a living economy initiative that supports locally-owned enterprises with products or services that meet local needs and pays fair wages.

Sustainable Portsmouth, New Hampshire



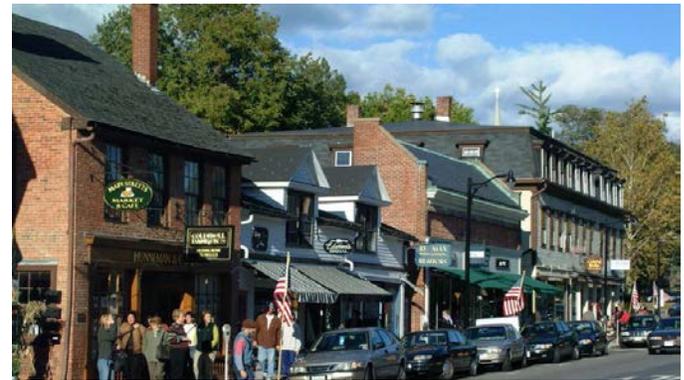
Bert Cohen of Portsmouth NH was one of the City's first sustainability "fire souls"

Photo courtesy Sarah James

Portsmouth's sustainability movement began with its 2005 Master Plan revision involving hundreds of citizens calling for greater City awareness of and action toward sustainability. As a next step, Portsmouth's City and Deputy City Managers commissioned sustainability training for all City Councilors, board members, and department heads; the training introduced the APA sustainability objectives and addressed how to work with these objectives to systematically change policies and practices. In 2007, the Portsmouth City Council adopted the APA sustainability objectives as guiding municipal policy.

Today, a City Sustainability Coordinator meets monthly with department heads to review sustainability progress. Working toward sustainability has become part of everyday City business. At the same time, three community organizations have spread the word among Portsmouth citizens and businesses through initiating sustainability study circles, developing a five-year sustainability plan, and planning an annual Sustainability Fair. This fair attracts thousands of people from the region to see examples of local sustainability initiatives and businesses such as local organic food producers, electric cars, and eco-clothing, as well as examples of the City's sustainability accomplishments. The trash from the entire event can be carried away in one trash bag—everything else is composted or recycled. Portsmouth now features LEED-certified buildings such as a library, water treatment plant, fire station, and a green-renovated historic middle school building. Other sustainability accomplishments include land conservation, water conservation, and green mosquito control. Portsmouth also incorporated the APA sustainability objectives in its zoning ordinance.

Concord, Massachusetts



Concord became one of the first towns in the nation to ban sale of plastic water bottles as of January 2013.

Photo © Ian Britton

In 2011, the Concord Board of Selectmen voted to adopt the four APA sustainability objectives and use these objectives as action and policy guides throughout all departments. Since then, the Town has produced an energy reduction plan that includes a smart grid power system, energy efficiency for all Town buildings, an outdoor lighting policy, the installation of solar panels on a former landfill, and a solar home challenge. In addition, Concord now uses green storm water retention, green cleaning supplies for Town buildings, and solar trash compactors. A community organization called Concord CAN is actively carrying out citizen sustainability education with a focus on issues such as local food production, home energy use reduction, and climate change.

Overall Community Sustainability Accomplishments

Soon after adopting the APA sustainability objectives, most communities created a shared vision of their future sustainable community and conducted a baseline sustainability analysis of how they initially measured up to the objectives, according to a 2010 survey. In subsequent years, the majority of these communities created sustainability implementation teams, conducted energy and waste audits, and developed sustainability plans. Several communities revised their master plans and land use regulations to focus on sustainability. Sustainable development projects have included green redevelopment of industrial areas, green roofs, local farmers markets, green purchasing standards, adoption of LEED building standards, emissions inventories and energy reduction plans, green fire stations and libraries, green street programs, plans for energy independence, municipal sustainability coordinators, municipal employees trainings, and ongoing community sustainability education. One community has partnered with over 180 local organizations and businesses to promote sustainability.

How It Got Started

In 2004-05, the founders of the Northern Wisconsin Chequamegon Bay initiative and other sustainability activists learned about municipalities in Sweden that were making remarkable and widespread progress toward community sustainability. All of these Swedish communities had adopted a set of guiding sustainability principles as official municipal policy—the same set of principles the APA Sustainability Policy Guide’s objectives were developed from. To date, over 80 Swedish municipalities—almost 35 percent of all in the nation—have adopted these principles and put them into practice throughout their local governments and larger communities. These communities have come to be known as “eco-municipalities,” as have those communities in the U.S. and beyond that have adopted the same principles or the related APA sustainability objectives. Eco-municipalities commit to a broad-based approach for implementing the objectives.

Key to Success

Taking a systems approach to community sustainability is an important feature of successful eco-municipalities. Many approaches to community sustainability use a “silo approach”—that is, taking on one or more separate sustainable development projects or initiatives. In contrast, a systems approach focuses not only on one aspect of sustainability, such as renewable energy, but also on the interrelated

issues of land use, impact on natural systems, toxic materials, and human needs, fairly and efficiently.

The APA sustainability objectives are well-suited as a tool for carrying out a systems approach in community sustainability planning. Because these objectives are “first order” principles, they can be applied to any municipal or planning subject as well as to all sectors of community life: municipal departments and policies, community and household actions, and businesses. When all parts of the community use these same principles to guide change to sustainability, the resulting network of actions will constitute a “system” whose component parts and projects do not conflict with—but rather complement—each other. Even if a department is working on a specific project, such as a green building ordinance or sustainable purchasing guidelines, using the four sustainability objectives as sustainable design guidelines can assure that the project will not solve one problem while creating other problems in the process.

Eco-municipalities around the world

The eco-municipality approach has spread to Japan, Africa, Europe, South America, and New Zealand in addition to North America and Sweden. The first International Eco-municipality Conference took place in Helsingborg, Sweden in 2008.



Participants of the First International Eco-municipality Conference in 2008.

Current Networking Initiative

Efforts are underway to connect eco-municipalities around the world and sustainability activists who share their values in a Web arena called Ecomuna. Ecomuna is intended to serve as a capacity center for community sustainability where activists can come together to share experiences, learn about best practices, and participate in real time on-line discussions and seminars. An objective of the

project is to accelerate the transition to sustainability around the world through local communities. Ecomuna is seeking participants for this project; if interested, contact the author of this article at the address below.

For More Information

- » The sustainability objectives of APA's Planning for Sustainability Policy Guide: www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/sustainability.htm (Section III A)
- » Examples of municipal resolutions adopting APA's sustainability objectives: www.instituteforemunicipalities.org/ecomunicipalities.

- » City of Portsmouth, NH, sustainability initiatives and history: www.cityofportsmouth.com/sustainability/timeline.htm
- » Town of Concord, MA, sustainability actions and principles: www.concordma.gov/pages/ConcordMA_Planning/sustainability%20page

About the author: Sarah James has operated a city and town planning consulting practice for many years. She and Torbjörn Lahti are the co-authors of *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities & Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* (New Society Publishers, 2004) which received Planetizen's Top Ten Books Award in Planning & Design in 2005. She can be contacted at james.s@att.net.

A Changing Planning Paradigm for a Changing World

By Doug Melnick

Major urban flooding, expansive wildfires, species extinctions, and severe drought are just some of the challenges that planners are confronted with in these early days of the 21st century. These natural trends have been clearly linked to climate change as outlined in the most recent [Draft National Climate Assessment](#), which states:

Climate change is already affecting the American people. Certain types of weather events have become more frequent and/or intense, including heat waves, heavy downpours, and, in some regions, floods and droughts. Sea levels is rising, oceans are becoming more acidic, and glaciers and arctic sea ice are melting. These changes are part of the pattern of global climate change, which is primarily driven by human activity.

The social, environmental and economic impacts of our changing climate are not something that planners have decades to respond to, as we are already experiencing them now. Rising food prices, climate refugees struggling to rebuild their lives after major storm events, and extreme heat events are just a few examples of how climate change is impacting our work today.

The question for planners is, how do we respond in a way that reaffirms our relevance and impact. We cannot remain

isolated within the traditional silo of plans, regulations, and theory, but we need to embrace the realities of our changing world. It is time for us to take an active role in mitigating human-caused (anthropogenic) climate change and adapting our communities to current and future impacts, improving efficiency, and increasing resiliency.

Planners have the opportunity, responsibility, and training to provide leadership and vision to our residents, stakeholders, and elected officials as we chart our way through a changing landscape. We can do this by integrating local energy and food security, vulnerability assessments, emergency response planning, and the economic impacts of climate change into our everyday work. There are many resources and best practices available that can help planners reach beyond our usual approach.

Eco Districts are one emerging field being pioneered by the [Portland Sustainability Institute](#), as well as the cities of Portland, OR, Cleveland, OH, and Vancouver, BC, just to name a few, and are highly integrated neighborhoods that focus on smart buildings, food and energy production, waste and water conservation and reuse, multi-modal transportation options, open and recreational



Recycling, composting, and garbage at the Portland Farmer's Market

Photo © Sarah Gilbert

spaces, and tracking progress toward neighborhood sustainability over time.

A number of planners and sustainability professionals are making significant progress in increasing local food resiliency by knocking down barriers to urban agriculture and getting vacant land into productive agricultural use, thereby cleaning up vacant lots, creating jobs, and improving local health.

Now more than ever, planners must work in an arena that cuts between traditional silos and the search for multiple benefits or co-benefits within policies and projects. We can no longer simply look at a stormwater pipe as a means for conveying runoff, but rather as an opportunity to build in capacity for future storms through rightsizing and the inclusion of green infrastructure, which reduces flooding, provides green space, improves air quality, and increases property values.

Most communities don't have sustainability offices that focus on these challenges and the opportunity exists for municipal planners to expand their roles and fill this void. In the City of Boulder, CO, for example, planners are at the forefront of innovative energy policies that are driving the rental housing market to provide energy-efficient and affordable housing through a Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance (RECO), and in Albany, NY, the planning department has taken on numerous roles ranging from serving as the lead city agency working with the New York Power Authority to develop an Albany Energy Master Plan to overseeing climate change mitigation and adaptation work.

Planners can and should reach beyond their comfort zones to take on new responsibilities and partner with new groups and specialists, such as the [Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#) and the [Institute for Sustainable Communities](#), two organizations that are leading the way by helping municipalities and communities become more efficient, innovative and resilient through information sharing and cooperation. The result is diverse communities that are making real and timely on-the-ground changes that are improving the quality of life for their residents now, while preparing for an uncertain future.

Doug Melnick, AICP is Director of Planning and Sustainability for the City of Albany, New York. If you'd like to learn about what Albany's Planning Department has been doing to redefine its role and help Albany become more sustainable or just to discuss the views above, he can be reached at melnickd@ci.albany.ny.us.

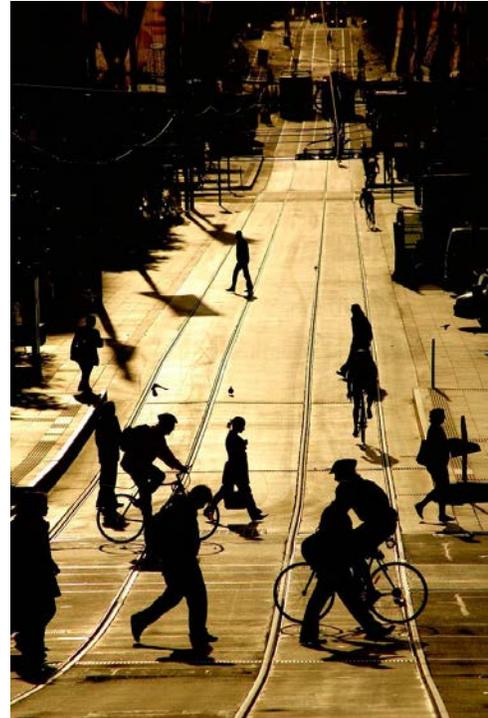


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WRITE FOR THE NEWSLETTER!

The new Sustainable Communities Division Newsletter Editorial Board is excited to announce the opportunity for members and other interested individuals to submit original articles, research summaries, letters, suggestions, workshops and other educational opportunities and best practices for inclusion in our quarterly newsletter. Material must be relevant to the practice of sustainable community planning, community-based environmental stewardship, and related topics. We are mainly looking for original content that is 2500 words or less, especially if you're including graphics or pictures. Please include necessary citations and all graphics must be at least 300 dpi. All material should be submitted electronically to **Newsletter Coordinator Christopher Ryan** (christopher@relocalizations.com). The next submission deadline is **July 1st, 2013**, and will generally be the 1st week in March, July, October, and December. All content is copyright the American Planning Association unless otherwise indicated, and any reprint requests must be submitted to APA Leadership Coordinator Susan Turner at sturner@planning.org. Please contact the Newsletter Coordinator for copyright forms and for any questions.

APA Sustainable Communities Division

ANNUAL RECEPTION / MEETING

Sunday 4:30pm - 6:00pm, 2013 National Conference

PROGRAM

Welcome to our fourth annual reception, our first as an official APA Division! Enjoy the food and drinks, and visit the stations around the room to find out what we're up to and how you can get involved. Every 20 minutes we'll grab everyone's attention for a quick activity – the “meeting” part of this event. Please put your conversations on hold at these times.

STATIONS

- **Communications:** Get involved with our newsletter, bulletin, social media...
- **Membership:** Volunteer! Become a Division leader! Start a new project!
- **Collaborations:** Help catalog best practices on the interactive map. Connect with folks working at the State Chapter level.
- **Connections & Mentorships:** Learn and help others learn.

SPONSORS

