

HIGH LEVEL TRAINING FOR TEXAS PLANNING DIRECTORS

By Mary Kay Peck, FAICP
Principal MKPeck Associates

Many fortunate Texas APA Chapter members attended the two-day Planning Directors Workshop immediately prior to the annual Texas APA conference in Galveston, Texas. Participants set the agenda via a pre-workshop online survey to determine topics and issues they were most interested in. The highly qualified instructors are noted for their practical, “in the trenches” experience that resonates with their peers. The engaging and interactive sessions were especially lively and enhanced the program’s overall value for all involved.



Mary Kay Peck, FAICP, training at the Planning Directors Workshop in Galveston, Texas

The workshop was coordinated by Mary Kay Peck, FAICP, Principal of MKPeck Associates, with assistance from Michael Neuman, AICP, Associate Professor at Texas A & M University. The workshop was staffed by nationally recognized planning directors: Anna Brienich, AICP Commissioner and Planning Director of Brunswick, Maine; Valerie Hubbard, AICP Commissioner and Director of Planning Services for Akerman, Senterfitt; and Mitchell Silver, AICP, APA Board of Directors and Planning Director of Raleigh, North Carolina. Workshop participants received twelve CM credits for attending.

In the *Leadership Skills* session presented by Peck, Breinich and Neuman, participants learned how to boost their leadership abilities and meet the unique challenges of public sector leadership. The

ability to manage a department, operate as a member of an organizational team and represent local government was addressed by Peck, Neuman and Silver in the session, *The Role of the Planning Director*. Practical tips and strategies for getting the support needed for success were covered in *The Politics of Planning* facilitated by Silver, Peck and Breinich.

Participants learned how to develop big picture strategies and how to build a culture of continuous improvement within their department. Best practices for telling the planning story were conveyed in *Communication Strategies* led by Silver and Peck.

Useful pointers on how to do the important work of planning during this economic slowdown were shared by Breinich and Peck during the

session on *How to Stretch Your Budget*. Lastly, Neuman, Hubbard and Peck discussed innovative sustainability efforts from around the globe to round out the agenda.

A sampling of the participant’s feedback indicates that the training was worthwhile and practical. “This was a fantastic event with top notch speakers. I would

definitely do this again.” “The course was awesome!” “There was a wealth of useful guidance.” “This was a wonderful opportunity for planning directors/assistant directors to come together and learn.”

If you are interested in developing a similar program for your entity or chapter, have questions or would like additional information, please contact your division officers.

Galveston, TX
*Population: 57,086
*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Hitting the **Reset** Button



New Realities in Local Government



By Karen Haluza, AICP, Planning Manager
 Santa Ana, CA

The Orange County Planning Directors Association (PDAOC) held its 12th annual Planning Director’s Forum on October 22, 2009 at the Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda. The half-day seminar was attended by over 150 people representing nearly every City in Orange County and more than a dozen private firms. This year’s theme, “Hitting the Reset Button” began with the premise that what is occurring with regard to the economy, housing market, commercial real estate and employment is not merely a natural fluctuation in the market but rather represents a paradigm shift which will have dramatic effects on land use policy and future development. Each of the sessions then focused on a specific component of that shift ranging from changes in the housing market to getting the most out of commercial corridors to new methods for providing essential City services.

Yorba Linda, CA
 *Population: 65,717
 *Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Forum concluded by shifting away from the central theme to provide a lunch session where attendees had the opportunity to meet and learn about the role of the Planning

Director from the Directors themselves. Planning Directors from various cities in Orange County were on hand to provide first-hand the unique path that they took to become the Planning Director in their City.



Richard Millhouse Nixon Presidential Library

Columbus Planning: Progress on Numerous Fronts

**By Vince Papsidero, AICP, Planning Administrator
Columbus, OH**

Columbus is a college town, state capital and growing city that will be celebrating its bicentennial in 2012. It has weathered the economic downturn better than many cities because its role as an education and government center provide some insulation from the highs and lows of the national economy. Columbus established a unique regional utility system with strong annexation controls and growth boundaries in the 1950s that assured that the city would capture a significant part of the region's suburban growth. This system has helped the city protect its tax base and maintained its regional influence.

A city of 776,000 with 228 square miles within city limits, Columbus offers a mix

of urban and suburban neighborhoods. Part of six divisions within the Development Department, the Planning Division focuses much of its effort at the neighborhood level. This typically includes the preparation and implementation of neighborhood

plans (under a consistent methodology focused on land use, urban design and development

guidelines) and the adoption of commercial overlay districts to reinforce a walkable built environment by guiding the built form, parking, landscaping, and graphics.

The division also supports 12 separate boards, commissions and panels. These include five architectural review commissions that cover the city's 18 historic districts (9,000 tax parcels), the Downtown Commission overseeing design and graphics review, the Columbus Art Commission,

reviewing public art proposals, and the University Area Review Board overseeing design review for commercial and residential properties surrounding the Ohio State University (a city within a city with a daytime population of 100,000). As an aside, Columbus has the second largest college student population in the United States (right behind Boston).

The city's Historic Preservation Office was transferred back to Planning in the 2009 budget. As part of managing their reduced resources (and considering a restructuring of the historic preservation process) the division facilitated a working group of commission chairs that recommended combining some commissions, expanding staff reviews and establishing a fee structure to support the office. As part of this

effort, the division is initiating a public process to create new design guidelines for the Short North, the arts and entertainment district that links Downtown with the University District.

One of the major initiatives of 2009 was an update to the parking code. Currently before

Council, the proposal "right sizes" parking requirements by greatly reducing minimums based on field

research, establishes parking maximums to minimize impervious surface, updates landscaping and lighting requirements, and mandates off-street bicycle parking consistent with the recently adopted bike plan, among other provisions.

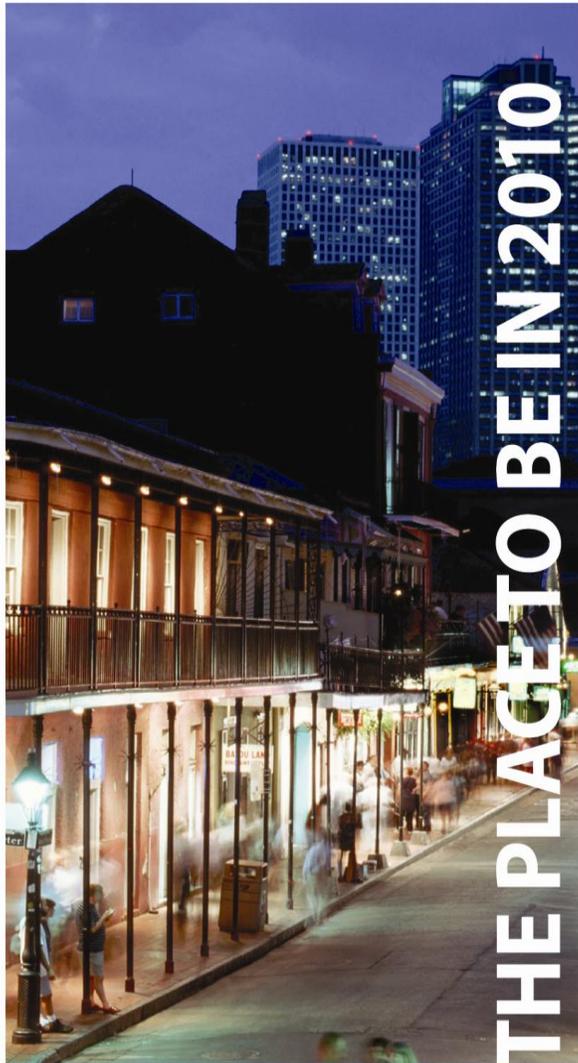
Along with some of the other standard responsibilities (LUCA and the 2010 Census, annexation management, development review, etc.),



Statehouse in Columbus Ohio

Columbus, OH
*Population: 754,885
*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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www.planning.org/conference



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Columbus Planning

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the division is engaged with the preparation of a new Downtown Master Plan working with MSI and the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, and recently assisted with Mayor Michael Coleman’s 2012 Bicentennial visioning process. At the neighborhood level the division is also working on several economic development strategies to guide reinvestment. Economic considerations also guide the city’s Pay as We Grow program to address infrastructure and facility needs in newly developing areas. Planning staff provides analysis and support to this effort.

Planning is also working with Franklin County and two townships in preparing a master plan for the Darby Town Center, a key strategy coming out of the Big Darby Watershed Master Plan (see Strategies Fall 2007 edition) that seeks to protect 20,000 acres of open space. The town center is intended to harness and direct development while generating acquisition revenues. Urban Design Associates is the lead consultant. Additional multi-jurisdictional planning work includes the established Rocky Fork-Blacklick Accord and South Central Accords, both of which involve active partnerships with other communities.

**City Planning & Management
 Division at APA 2010 Conference**

Each Division of APA now has one by-right session and may request a second. CPMD’s by-right session is “Community Education & Engagement”. The Planning Directors of San Jose, CA, Philadelphia, PA, and Louisville, KY are tentatively scheduled to present.

“Women Planning Directors in Big Cities” is proposed to be presented again after its successful session in Minneapolis last year. Scheduled speakers include directors from Los Angeles, Dallas and host city New Orleans.