



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

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Reading, PA – On October 21, 2019, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA Chapter of APA) held its Annual Awards Luncheon in Reading, PA where over 480 attendees celebrated the esteemed award winners of this year’s highly competitive program.

The following awards were presented:

Award for a Plan

**Albion's Plan (a.k.a. The Albion Borough Comprehensive Plan)
Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development**

Albion’s Plan is a shining example of implementable planning for a small town of 1,500 people. The plan was done in partnership with Erie County planning staff and no paid consultant. It focuses on four community priorities, determined by extensive input from citizens, written in their words not in plannerese, each priority having talking points, goals, realistic action plans, and sections indicating how residents, businesses, and organizations can help. The plan built partnerships with the chamber of commerce, fairgrounds association, the school district, and area churches to help implementation. It spurred early action, with a zoning ordinance update underway before the plan was finished.

Award for a Plan

**Embrace Millcreek
Millcreek Township Planning Commission**

Embrace Millcreek was undertaken to help the 53,000-population suburb of Erie face potential disinvestment and decline after decades of development and prosperity. The plan is fearless in addressing challenges. It combined a field survey of 19,000 properties with market data to develop surgical strategies for neighborhoods. It defines core values arising from neighborhood and stakeholder meetings, and “We will...” statements of planning principles to guide township decisions and actions. Two open houses were held using the unique theme of Choices and Trade-Offs. While a single-municipality plan, Embrace Millcreek was informed by and aligned with recently-updated plans for neighboring Erie City and Summit Township.

Award for a Plan

Landscapes3: Chester County Comprehensive Plan Chester County Planning Commission

Landscapes3 is the 2018 renewal of Chester County's commitment since 1996 to balancing growth and preservation. It reestablishes the Landscapes legacy of resource preservation, revitalized urban and suburban centers, housing diversity, transportation choices, collaboration, and resiliency while introducing new and innovative ideas. The plan and associated website feature a graphic and engaging presentation. A unique aspect is a four-part video series, using revealing drone footage, promoting preservation of the county's exceptional character. The plan was built with extensive community involvement. It focuses on a limited number of high-priority, achievable recommendations, including continued county funding for planning and land use ordinance updates at the municipal level.

Award for a Plan

Bike Montco Montgomery County Planning Commission

Bike Montco is Montgomery County's outstanding plan to create on-road bike facilities. The plan addressed challenges of developing on-road facilities by using a new Level of Traffic Stress tool to identify best road segments for bike mobility; and by creatively partnering with PennDOT via PennDOT Connects and municipalities via county funding to install bike facilities on their roads. The plan used an online "wikimap" and survey of citizens to learn bicycling habits, well-used routes, and obstacles to biking. Bike Montco focuses on a carefully selected on-road network and relies on the county government to lead implementation.

Award for a Project, Program or Practice

Bucks County Maps and Data Portal Bucks County Planning Commission

Bucks County Planning Commission created a web-based open data portal to provide information about initiatives of the county commissioners and work of the planning commission. Users can obtain information about the opioid epidemic, proposed subdivisions and land developments, open space and agland preservation, recycling and hazardous waste, and trail planning, to name a few examples. Users will find a variety of documents, datasets, and interactive maps. The portal also links related data from other organizations' websites. The website and open data portal were created by planning commission staff using commercially available software.

Award for a Project, Program or Practice

Upper Perkiomen Valley Gateway and Wayfinding Sign Program PerkUp c/o Upper Perkiomen Valley Chamber of Commerce

The Upper Perkiomen Gateway and Wayfinding Sign Program is designed to market the region for outdoor recreation and nature tourism. It also unites and brands seven municipalities within two counties as a single unique place: the Upper Perkiomen Valley. The program implemented a recommendation of the joint comprehensive plan of the seven municipalities. The program engaged a consultant, an internationally-renowned design firm, reps from the municipalities, and students from the Western Montgomery Career and Technology Center to design and create prototypes of signs. Signs have been in place for a year successfully guiding residents and visitors to destinations and amenities.

Award for a Leader – Professional Planner

James R. Hassinger, Ph.D., AICP, Executive Director, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission

Jim Hassinger has been executive director of SPC since 2001, demonstrating leadership, ethics, and commitment to planning in service to a region of 2.6 million people. Jim led planning and development of hundreds of projects that shaped the region, including the award-winning 2008 Project Region long-range plan and the current Smart Moves plan, both recognized for innovative and extensive community involvement. Jim expanded SPC's activities in multi-modal planning, human resources transportation, and water resources. He has been a champion of local governments, and has been influential in state and national affairs including being chair of APA's Regional and Intergovernmental Division.

Award for a Leader – Citizen Planner

Laurie Lafontaine – Indiana County Planning Commission

For nearly 30 years, Laurie Lafontaine has been a volunteer supporting community planning initiatives and working collaboratively with planners, elected officials, and the whole community to improve Indiana County. She currently chairs the Indiana County Planning Commission. She was described as forward-thinking, committed, and tenacious in assisting a county comprehensive plan, stormwater plan, updated SALDO, and sustainable development task force. She played a major role launching a trails movement in the 1990s and planning and completing the Ghost Town National Recreation Trail and other trails. She has been active in Livable Indiana Neighborhood Connections, Indiana WalkWorks, the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the Southwest PA Commission Public Participation Panel, and numerous other planning efforts.

Award for a Leader – Elected Official

R.J. Sokol – North Belle Vernon Borough Council

R.J. Sokol, councilman for North Belle Vernon, a small borough of 1,800 people in Westmoreland County, led a two-year effort to revitalize the run-down and closed community park. Sokol led a mostly-volunteer community team in planning and redeveloping the park. Planning work included research of needs, particularly for youth sports growing in interest and not being met elsewhere, developing a funding plan, and obtaining approvals. Sokol managed purchases and construction, including much donated and volunteer work to reduce cost. A feature of the park is its special needs facility with wheelchair slide and swing, car-seat swings, and dual swings for babies and guardians. Sokol credited the community saying, “Everybody stepped in to be a part.”

Award for a Leader – Distinguished Service

Richard Collier, FAICP

Rick Collier has demonstrated a commitment to planning, his community, and the APA PA Chapter over a long and successful career. Formerly at Wallace Roberts & Todd, and now at his own firm LandConcepts Group, Rick has led planning for major environmental preservation projects in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Florida. He is chair of the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association for which he led development of a trail network and an innovative water quality implementation plan involving 13 municipalities and 4 wastewater plants. In his home of Upper Dublin Township, Rick has been a driving force for open space preservation, walkability, and zoning to transfer development rights out of the floodplain. Rick is treasurer of the Southeast Section of the PA Chapter of APA where in over 20 years he has played a strong role growing the section’s capacity to provide valuable planning training for professionals and citizens. In 2018, he was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners in recognition of his excellence in professional planning.

Certificate of Merit

Student Project – Texas A&M University

Johnstown: Addressing the Consequences of Depopulation with Smart Decline Techniques

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For more information about the PA Chapter of APA, or to obtain contact information for local award winners, please contact Kim Gusic at 717-671-4510 or info@planningpa.org. The website address is www.planningpa.org.