



American Planning Association  
**Pennsylvania Chapter**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

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Pittsburgh, PA – On October 19, 2021, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA Chapter of APA) held its Annual Awards Luncheon in Pittsburgh, PA where over 300 attendees celebrated the esteemed award winners of this year’s highly competitive program.

The following awards were presented:

**Award for a Plan**

**Climate Action Plan**

**City of Bethlehem, WSP & Nurture Nature Center**

The Bethlehem Climate Action Plan is a progressive, serious, and implementable plan that tackles one of the most complex planning issues communities face today – climate change. Bethlehem’s Climate Action Plan embraces the principles of equitability, prosperity, resiliency, healthfulness, inclusivity, and science. It puts environmental justice and equity front and center while providing specific goals and strategies to reduce Bethlehem’s greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the changing climate. To make the plan as inclusive and usable as possible, Bethlehem conducted an extensive and innovative outreach process, which led to a plan that is graphically compelling, easy to use, and applicable to a wide range of groups and individuals.

**Award for a Plan**

**West Scranton Neighborhood Plan**

**NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania & WRT**

Historically disinvested and overshadowed by other parts of the City, the West Scranton Neighborhood sought to create its first comprehensive neighborhood plan to strengthen a sense of place and identity and foster economic vitality. To engage the community, and specifically hard to reach residents, a steering committee of 26 persons was established with more than half residents of the neighborhood. Efforts included a door-to-door survey, with more than 250 responses, and meeting in a box designed for youth, non-English speakers and senior citizens. Early action projects were completed throughout the planning process to show progress and gain community buy-in. The plan includes an implementation strategy with a mix of short-term and long-term goals to ensure momentum, with costs, responsible parties and prospective funding sources. The steering committee was kept intact to oversee implementation of the ten year plan, and shortly after approval, the neighborhood implemented the Hometown Hero’s Banner Program, crosswalk and park improvements and gateway signage. The plan achieves its essential purpose. Its thoughtful organization and graphics appeal to a wide range of users and the size and scope allow for implementation.

### **Award for a Plan**

#### **Pennsylvania Active Transportation Plan (Pub. 787)**

**Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; Johnson, Mirmiran and Thompson, Inc.; Alta Planning + Design, Inc.; Kittelson and Associates, Inc. & Stokes Creative Group, Inc.**

The Pennsylvania Active Transportation plan is the comprehensive resource for planning, design, implementation and evaluation of bicycle and pedestrian programs and policies. The current plan builds upon a history of active transportation planning in PA beginning in 1976. The plan brought together three additional state agencies, the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Department of Health to function as an advisory group. Public outreach included an interactive live webcast throughout the Commonwealth and a statewide survey completed by more than 13,000 individuals. Included is a how to guide for developing active transportation plans to serve as a resource for MPOs, RPOs, counties and local municipalities. The Active Transportation Plan provides a framework for collaboration among state, federal and local agencies to identify key issues and strategize how to advance improvements at all levels, with an emphasis on underrepresented PA communities that walk and bicycle out of necessity. Success of the plan is placed upon the Steering Committee, which to date has implemented eight specific strategies. This well-developed process and statewide outreach culminated in a plan transferrable to every user.

### **Award for a Project, Program or Practice**

#### **Zoning Code – Public Participation Process**

**Lower Merion Township – Building and Planning Department;  
Montgomery County Planning Commission & DPZ Associates**

Since its inception in 1927, the zoning code has been continuously updated until the 2020 comprehensive rewrite, predicated upon the 2016 comprehensive plan. The result was a hybrid code designed to preserve the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century railroad suburb with form-based standards to guide growth and redevelopment of the community. Critical to this process was extensive public engagement guided by Township Staff. The process began with translating hundreds of publically generated recommendations from the comprehensive plan. The staff then developed a dedicated webpage, utilized social media and implemented an interactive zoning map to inform residents. Staff coordinated the Civic Engagement Committee, which conducted monthly stakeholder interviews, small group meetings, and large group meetings with civic organizations, institutions and business owners. Staff also facilitated 42 public meetings and five open houses. The engagement process was concurrent with code drafting and resulted in a seamless feedback loop of project improvement. A one-day charrette was held with the Montgomery County Planning Commission, developers, engineers, architects and attorneys to test the draft code, resulting in final calibrations prior to advertisement for adoption. The two-year civic engagement process created a culture of trust, resulting in unanimous adoption of the plan by all fourteen township commissioners.

### **Award for a Project, Program or Practice**

#### **Allegheny Green Web**

##### **Allegheny County Parks Foundation & Allegheny Green Web Coalition of Partner and Advisor Organizations**

The Green Web envisions countywide connectivity through greenspace including county and municipal parks, conservation lands and other community assets, with an emphasis on diverse outdoor experiences and access for all residents. The planning effort began and is guided by identifying nodes of populations lacking green space access. These wellness and mobility desserts were identified by the Allegheny County Health Department and more than 20 organizations. The Green Web employed an interactive web-based Storymap to share, continuously update and explain the project. The metrics and methodologies developed are transferable to other counties and are scalable to municipal plans. The Green Web is to be adopted as part of the County's Comprehensive Plan and will guide greenway and trail development. Implementation is underway, as the Allegheny Parks Foundation along with Hollow Oak and Allegheny Land Trusts and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council identify local trail connections and regional connections to the Great Allegheny Passage Trail Network.

### **Award for a Project, Program or Practice**

#### **PennDOT's Freight Planning Guidance (Pub. 790)**

##### **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation & Larson Design Group**

The unprecedented growth of on-line retail has pushed freight planning to the forefront of how the movement of goods directly influences the cultural and economic competitiveness of a region. PennDOT's Center for Program Development and Management recognized that no such planning document addressed the complexities of the supply chain network from manufacture to the end user. PennDOT set forth to compile the best practices, resources, and tools for regional freight planning and developed a guide, the first in the country, to assist Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commissions with freight planning. The process began with engagement from rural communities to the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest seaport, and quickly developed into a step-by-step guidance for what is essential, how it is carried out, critical communication, things to avoid and anticipated outcomes. Perhaps the best takeaway was a continuous engagement with stakeholders to work toward a common vision. The final plan is publicly available on PennDOT's Website along with a webinar to familiarize planners with the processes. This guide is transferable to MPOs and RPOs throughout Pennsylvania and the country and identifies how maintaining and improving the safety and efficiency of a freight network supports a strong and competitive economy.

### **Award for a Leader – Professional Planner**

#### **Paul W. Gordon, Senior Transportation Planner**

##### **Bucks County Planning Commission**

Since 2006, Mr. Gordon has been the Bucks County Planning Commission's principal trail planner. As principal author of the Bucks County Open Space and Greenways Plan, the document has been the blueprint for an interconnected network of greenways that protect ecologically valuable lands, habitats and migration pathways and provides open space, recreational opportunities and access to the County's historic and cultural resources. Subsequent to this effort, Mr. Gordon has authored numerous plans and studies including the Upper, Middle and Lower Neshaminy Creek and the Mill-Queen Anne-Black Ditch Creek Trail Feasibility Studies; Newtown Rail Trail, the Buckingham and Northampton Township's Master Trail and Bicycle Plans and a brochure series for Newtown, Neshaminy Creek and Upper Bucks Trails. Through his efforts, the County has secured more than \$6 million in trail grants. Additionally, Mr. Gordon developed the County's Master Parcel File of open space and contributed to the award-winning County Maps and Data Portal. Perhaps Mr. Gordon's greatest contribution is his public education and outreach with the public, elected officials and other stakeholders culminating in the construction of an interconnected trail system deemed to be very popular with residents.

**Award for a Leader – Emerging Planner**

**Matthew Popek, AICP, Assistant Transportation Section Manager  
Montgomery County Planning Commission**

A graduate of Temple University’s Community and Regional Planning Program, Mr. Popek has grown within the Montgomery County Planning Commission from an entry level to management position in five years. He crafts and manages the County’s Transportation Program, including all multi-modal transportation projects from right-of-way acquisitions for all road, bridge and trail projects culminating in 19 bridge replacements and the development of a major regional trail. Mr. Popek also serves as the Chair of the Upper Merion Township Planning Commission; a member of the Township’s Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee; the Township’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan Committee and the King of Prussia Historical Society Board of Directors. Mr. Popek’s community involvement goes beyond that of traditional planning efforts, giving regular presentations on planning issues and opportunities at Temple University and the Upper Merion School District.

**Award for a Leader – Distinguished Service**

**Denny Puko**

During his 15 years at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Denny Puko became the face of planning for many people around the state, helping 100 local planning efforts, undertaking numerous state planning projects, facilitating the work of the PA State Planning Board, and leading the team that prepared DCED’s implementable plan materials. Prior to his tenure at DCED, Denny worked 27 years in county planning, including serving as executive director of the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission. For the Chapter, Denny has served twenty years on the awards committee, thirteen years as chair; has been on six annual conference planning committees; and has facilitated two board strategic plan retreats.

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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](mailto:info@planningpa.org). The website address is [www.planningpa.org](http://www.planningpa.org).