



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

Media Contact:

Kim Gusic
Chapter Administrator
717-671-4510
www.planningpa.org
info@planningpa.org

October 14, 2024

Erie, PA – On October 14, 2024, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA Chapter of APA) held its Annual Awards Luncheon in Erie, PA where over 320 attendees celebrated the esteemed award winners of this year’s highly competitive program.

The following awards were presented:

Award for a Plan

**City of Erie Historic Preservation Plan
City of Erie Historic Review Commission &
Preservation Plan Steering Committee
The Lakota Group**

As a city grounded by manufacturing and the maritime industry, the City of Erie, until recently, has not had historic preservation as a guiding principle. The city now does, and its Historic Preservation Plan offers innovative practices relative to Erie’s needs within a comprehensive and easy to use format.

In the plan, five key values were established through community outreach and stakeholder engagement sessions, and ten key imperatives were identified to guide the recommendations. The plan’s findings ultimately include a variety of initiatives, associated implementation actions, and targeted benchmark deadlines-all meant for use by policy makers, stakeholders, neighborhoods, and residents.

The plan engages diverse sectors of the community to participate in preservation efforts of varying scales, stages, and budgets. Collectively, the plan is both attainable and realistic while providing a visionary concept for a mid-size, heritage, rust-belt city.

Erie’s 2016 comprehensive plan was instrumental in laying the groundwork for this historic preservation plan by acknowledging that blight, disinvestment, declining population, and shrinking revenue were issues working against Erie’s stability. The comprehensive plan also highlighted historic assets within the city and the need to make placemaking central to the city’s quality of life and potential revitalization. Erie’s Historic Preservation Plan builds on this preliminary work and provides an excellent guide for the city to use its deep historic routes and compelling historic resources as key competitive advantages in the quest for new investment. Through the plan, residents and neighborhoods have rediscovered the environment and place they collectively share.

Award for a Plan

Vision Zero: Hunting Park

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)

City of Philadelphia

Guided by the City of Philadelphia's Vision Zero program to eliminate deaths and serious injuries from traffic crashes by 2030, the City's Vision Zero Capital Plan 2025 identified the Hunting Park Avenue corridor as part of the High Injury Network. The Network represents only 12 percent of Philadelphia Streets, but accounts for 80 percent of severe crashes. Hunting Park Avenue is a four-lane arterial corridor that intersect three major roadways. Pedestrians often have to navigate through highspeed traffic with large distances between signalized crosswalks and bicyclists opt to ride along the wide sidewalks. The City retained DVRPC to prepare a transportation study and recommended improvements for the corridor. Utilizing their Indicators of Potential Disadvantage, they identified a high concentration of historically vulnerable population groups, making community engagement paramount to the success of the planning effort. A steering committee convened to establish baseline metrics and public outreach included events planned by community organizations and one-on-one conversations with community leaders and block captains. This formed the development of recommendations and later concept alternatives until the public agreed on a preferred design. The final plan included such traffic calming measures as a center median, and pedestrian and alternate transportation measures including bump outs and a shared bike/ped path. The resulting plan is engaging and easy to read. It uses data to drive recommendations and leverage dollars. In December of 2023, the City was awarded \$16.4 million in federal funding to implement two complete streets projects including Hunting Park. Further implementation of the plan will continue under the City through continued community engagement and planned improvements.

Award for a Project, Program or Practice

Allegheny Together

EvolveEA

Fourth Economy Consulting

Coming out of the pandemic, it is becoming clear that many downtowns, especially those around big cities, are at an inflection point. These places face a fundamental need to reinvent themselves to remain attractive and competitive.

Remaining vibrant was a key ingredient of the Allegheny County comprehensive plan, which spun out a program designed specifically to support the 43 traditional business districts stretched across the City of Pittsburgh. This program, titled **Allegheny Together**, was launched in 2007 and provided strategic planning and technical support through community visioning and focused commercial revitalization to 15 of the county's traditional "Main Street" business districts.

In 2019, Allegheny County hired *Fourth Economy Consultants* and *evolve environment : architecture (evolveEA)* to reimagine the program. The Team led participating downtowns through facilitated strategic and action planning process that produced downtown plans organized around a unique framework rooted in the community's sense of Place, Identity, and Market. Using the framework, the Team explored the Place-based aspects of business districts, their perceived Identities, and each district's Market potential.

The reimagined program immediately gained traction. People became excited about what was possible and the importance of planning and place-building. The Place, Identity and Market framework not only yielded positive outcomes in participating communities also generated a transferable model that could be used in other communities.

On the ground results have included the redevelopment of the Clocktower Plaza in Mt. Oliver Borough; a renovated historic bank building in the City of Clairton; and a business association in Pitcairn Borough.

Award for a Leader – Distinguished Service

Patty Elkis, Deputy Executive Director (Retired) Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Patty Elkis is recognized for her remarkable 32-year career at DVRPC, where she has demonstrated exceptional leadership, mentorship, and innovation in the planning field. Patty's commitment to fostering collaboration across public, private, and nonprofit sectors has significantly enhanced regional planning efforts, particularly in open space preservation, water quality, and clean energy.

Her dedication to mentoring emerging leaders and staff at DVRPC has been instrumental in the success of numerous initiatives, including the Food Systems, Regional Trails Planning, and Healthy Communities programs. Montgomery County Planning Commission's Executive Director, Scott France recalls, "...whether you were just starting out in the field or were a prominent stakeholder or board member for a planning organization, Patty would always make the effort to make sure you understood the importance and reasoning for the work she did," reflecting her commitment to mentorship and service to the profession of planning.

Patty's ability to build and nurture relationships has led to the creation of impactful projects, such as the Regional Open Space Priorities Report and the "Return on the Environment" reports, which have had enduring benefits for the region. Her innovative approach is evident in her work on the "Water Table" and the "Funding Navigator," both of which have provided crucial support for water infrastructure in underserved communities. As Scott France emphasizes, "Patty has also cultivated many relationships at the municipal level where so much of planning work actually comes to fruition."

Bringing together stakeholders wasn't always an easy task, but Patty regularly rose to the challenge. When faced with a proposal to distribute additional TMA funds, Chester County's Multimodal Transportation Planning Division Director, Brian Styche notes, "Patty exhibited patience, allowed for all viewpoints to be expressed, and ultimately facilitated a solution agreeable to most," highlighting her skill in navigating complex planning issues.

Patty's leadership in launching and sustaining initiatives like the Schuylkill Action Network, the NJ Municipal Environmental Service Planning Program, and the Municipal Actions to Protect Water Quality in the Delaware River Watershed further underscores her profound impact on regional planning and environmental stewardship. Her legacy is one of service, excellence, and a lasting contribution to the planning profession.

What the Committee had to say:

It's not only what Patty Elkis accomplished during her career that has helped to create her legacy, but the many accounts of how she did it – by establishing relationships, effectively communicating, building consensus, and mentoring emerging professionals, that will secure her legacy in planning for years to come. It is how Patty accomplished this work that makes her a standout choice for the Distinguished Service Award.

###

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.