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TOD Conference Is a Watershed Moment

By Gerry Bogacz, AICP
Planning Director, New York Metropolitan Transportation Council

Nearly 400 participants packed the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council/NYU Rudin Center conference on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) on November 14, co-sponsored by the NY Metro Chapter. Joel Ettinger, Executive Director of NYMTC, and Allison L. D. de Cerreño, the Rudin Center's Director, set the stage for the conference by discussing the current planning paradigm and changes needed to effectuate Transit Oriented Development. Keynote speaker Douglas Foy noted the obvious interest and remarked on the reality of a "watershed moment" for the TOD concept, brought about by large-scale challenges such as climate change, energy resources and costs, the country's economic struggles, and the ever-growing backlog of capital needs for transportation.

Mr. Foy pointed out that this confluence of issues and concerns has resulted in a growing focus on vehicle-miles of travel and its impact on climate, energy and economic vitality. Mr. Foy focused on the urgent need to get past the policy discussions and start to operationalize solutions in the context of our very complex federal system.

Panels at the conference explored both the potential and the promise of TOD, as well as providing examples of TOD in practice in New York, New Jersey and other areas of the country and the world. *Continued on next page*

December President's Report

By Donald Burns, AICP, President of the APA NY Metro Chapter



Season's Greetings! The holidays are upon us and I want to thank everyone who attended the American Planning Association (APA) Metro Chapter's Holiday party on December 15th at Top of the Times. It was a very successful party with an attendance around 220 members. It was good to see many familiar faces at the party networking and having fun. I want to thank Neal Stone, V.P. of Programs; Mary Findlen, Chapter Administrator; Matthew Schwartz, Chapter Intern; and all of the student volunteers for making the Holiday Party a successful event.

Continued on next page

In This Issue:

TOD – It's More Than Zoning.....	2
TODs: Making Connections That Actually Work.....	4
Planning Legacy of New Amsterdam Revealed in Dutch Week Tour.....	5
Commentary: The Zoning Barrier To Affordable Housing.....	6
Holiday Party Pictures.....	9
Report from the Federal Policy and Program Briefing.....	12
Life as an Expat Urban Planner in Abu Dhabi.....	13
How Frederick Law Olmsted Got the Central Park Job.....	16
Long Island Section Update.....	18
Remember Freedomland USA?.....	19
2009 Award Nominations.....	20
Upcoming Events.....	21

Several panelists joined Mr. Foy in underscoring the connection between TOD, pedestrian-friendly design and place making, bringing together all aspects of transportation in community centers. TOD was also discussed as an organizing concept for the whole approach of Smart Growth. However, there was a danger seen in isolating TOD projects, which underscored the need to create a coherent network of TOD locations that make sense in terms of transportation services, both rail and bus.

A webcast of the conference and several speaker presentations are available at www.wagner.nyu.edu/transportation/conferences/. A summary of the meeting is expected to be posted on the same page. This article first appeared in NYMTC-Notes.

TOD – It's More Than Zoning

by Peter Feroe, NYMTC 9/11 Memorial Program Intern, Westchester County Department of Planning

The November 14 conference on Transit Oriented Development (TOD), hosted by NYU Wagner's Rudin Center, was a great success. The largest takeaway from the event for me was that TOD is not simply about zoning decisions, encouraging mixed-use, density and pedestrian-friendly design. Rather, at its best, TOD permeates decision making throughout the government, both horizontally and vertically.

This point was summed up by the day's keynote speaker, Douglas Foy, who spoke about his experience in Massachusetts as the Secretary of Commonwealth Development. In this role, Mr. Foy oversaw the Departments of Transportation, Housing, Environment and Energy. Based on the lessons he learned in that position, he urged the audience to consider both the organizational structure and capital spending of government agencies when trying to advance an agenda of TOD. By bringing together the heads of the agencies listed above, he was able to begin to 'break down the silos' in which the departments had long operated. This allowed the departments to better coordinate their policies and advance a coordinated smart growth agenda.

In addition to integrating the leadership structure of these disparate agencies, Mr. Foy also was able to coordinate the capital spending of these agencies.

When you go to our website, <http://www.nyplanning.org/> you will notice that Metro Chapter has a new logo. This is part of APA's branding effort. APA National and the individual chapters are using the same logo style with their states initials, but each chapter has a different color for its logo. Go to <http://www.planning.org/chapters/> to see all of the chapters.

APA NY Metro Chapter has joined ten other chapters in co-sponsoring an online webcast series of 12 monthly webcasts where you can earn 1.5 CM credit each. The webcasts are free to APA NY Metro Chapter members. Please enroll and take advantage of this online continuing education opportunity and note that registration is limited to the first 1,000 people that enroll for each course. Next year NY Metro Chapter may have a chance to sponsor a continuing education webcast. If you have any ideas to a future webcast, please send them to me at DonBurns03@gmail.com.

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the forty-fourth President of the United States. He will inherit an economy that is in a recession that has affected our banking, real estate, and manufacturing industries. President-elect Obama seems to be focusing on improving our nation's infrastructure and developing an urban policy as part of his initial strategies. Hopefully, planners will be engaged in developing and choosing infrastructure projects and crafting urban policies.

As we close out 2008, we remember those who passed away this year: Norman Marcus former counsel to the NYC City Planning Commission; Walter Stafford, former NYU professor; Dorothy Miner, former counsel to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission and Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia University teaching Historic Preservation Law; and Verna Small, one of the founders of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and former chair of Community Board #2's Landmarks Committee.

Lastly, on behalf of the APA Metro Chapter's Executive Committee we wish you a Happy Holiday and Prosperous New Year in 2009.

Continued on next page

TOD – It's More Than Zoning Continued

This was paramount, as often the capital spending of one agency would be working in furtherance of a different policy agenda than the spending of another agency. For example, he cited the extension of water and sewer services into green fields by one department, while another was spending money encouraging urban infill development.

This theme of agency coordination and TOD planning permeating government decisions was repeated throughout the day. In the first panel, Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth Planning in New York State, spoke about the work that he is doing to help coordinate various state actions to promote TOD, as well as helping municipalities to do the same. Jeffery Boothe, Vice Chair of Reconnecting America, spoke of the need to work with several different state and local agencies and funding streams in order to implement TOD, a process that is sometimes daunting for a developer. In the second panel, Michael Schipper of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority spoke about his city's efforts at promoting TOD around their highly successful Euclid Avenue BRT system. He described the effort not just as a transit project, but as an urban investment strategy— one that paid large dividends when organizations, such as the Cleveland Clinic, re-oriented their master planning efforts to make Euclid Avenue the focus of their growth.

Clearly, integrating agency functions and coordinating capital spending is easier said than done. However, this conference demonstrated the benefits that can be achieved when a region places the goal of advancing TOD at the top of its agenda. It is clear that when governments allow or force TOD planning to permeate many of their agencies, they are better able to achieve successful TODs and all of its attendant benefits.

Mr. Feroe is a Master of Urban Planning Student at NYU's Wagner School

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TODs: Making Connections That Actually Work

By Meghan M. Miller, Planner
Westchester County Department of Planning

Creating areas where there is better access to all of our daily necessities, better access to schools, retail, office and transportation is vital in today's economy. Outlining how to make those connections work in an already built metro-region is extremely complex and was discussed at length at the conference, "Transit Oriented Development – A Blueprint for Success."

I found that the underlying message for encouraging TODs in the region and elsewhere was to "create connections." While this sounds like a somewhat easy task, the lack of connectivity is what New York State is grappling with right now, at the state and local levels, even at the federal level. Multiple agencies are working towards the same goals, but with different underlying agendas, separate policies, distinct processes and without communicating to each other. Ultimately the lack of connectivity between and within various agencies is resulting in more sprawl, over-spending, misuse of limited resources and environmental negligence.

Douglas Foy, president of Serrafix Corporation and keynote speaker, raised very good points about how we broach the subject of increasing density to encourage public transportation use. Stressing the need for inter-agency partnerships, Mr. Foy discussed the typical lack of cooperation between government and non-profit agencies that deal with affordable housing, transportation, environment and planning. Acting autonomously, each agency may make slight improvements to our daily living, i.e. less potholes, affordable rental units, flood mitigation, etc. However, it is essential to include all of those elements together, making sure that affordable units are close to transportation options, that environmental quality is considered when building roads, that land use decisions do more to mix uses and increase walkability in our municipalities.

Mr. Foy stressed the environmental benefits of connectivity and TODs asserting the best environmental performers are urban cities, not large-lot zoned municipalities, which result in increased land consumption and lack of mass transit or walkability. A shift to intensified growth can be achieved by altering mu-

nicipal zoning codes. The need for massive division of uses has ceased as the nation has witnessed great changes in industry over time. Mr. Foy also urged that zoning changes should eliminate or significantly reduce the requirements for providing off-street parking, thereby diminishing the need for greenfield and wasteful development.

As the conference continued, projects highlighted within NYC, New Jersey, Cleveland and Brisbane, Australia simply re-stated the talking points of Doug Foy: re-connect where there is a disconnect; allow for easier cooperation between municipal and non-governmental agencies; take all connections into account with TODs, not simply the transportation portion; and, lastly, promote increased density as environmentally conscious development.

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Planning Legacy of New Amsterdam Revealed in Dutch Week Tour

By Rick Landman, AICP

For the second year, Rick Landman, Esq., AICP, represented the New York Metro Chapter by conducting a walking tour as part of the “Dutch Week” program. In addition to explaining how America’s religious freedom was influenced more by the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam than the usual myths about the Puritans at Plymouth Rock, Mr. Landman showed how much of an impact these settlers had on New York’s current physical form.

Starting with the basic street patterns and names of Lower Manhattan, and then adding the tradition of long and narrow tax lots based on the Dutch pattern of taxation on canals, he developed a walk to show how the need for zoning with height and set back requirements are an indirect legacy from these days. “It was hard to develop a tour of New Amsterdam since nothing from 1624 really remains,” Mr. Landman said. “Everything that looks Dutch or commemorates the Dutch was built centuries later. Even Fraunces Tavern was under water when the Dutch settlers arrived.”

But this tour showed how the APA could participate in the celebration of old New Amsterdam, and he hopes to continue the tour next year for the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson’s arrival around Manhattan Island.

Around 45 people attended the tour along with Gajus Scheltema, Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The tour started at the Customs House (former Fort Amsterdam) and walked over to the Stone Street Historic District to see the footprint of the City Hall for New Amsterdam. The walk continued up towards the northern boundary at Wall Street, stopping to see the origins of New York City’s zoning resolution at 120 Broadway.

The tour is covered on the webpage at: <http://infotrue.com/tourdutch.html>.



Gajus Scheltema, Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (left), Rick Landman (right)



Participants toughing out the rain

Commentary: The Zoning Barrier To Affordable Housing

By George Raymond, FAICP

Two recent editorials in The New York Times remarked that “while everyone agrees that the New York Metropolitan Region...needs a lot of (affordable housing)...everyone has a million reasons why it can’t go here; there or anywhere else.” These remarks summarize the current status of a long unfolding process which has shaped not only the New York metropolitan region but, generally, also all of the nation’s other economically successful regions (i.e., Boston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco). They are all characterized by a wall of regulatory barriers that encircle the key cities and their inner suburbs and that, outside of them, almost preclude the construction of multi-family housing – the only type of housing that can be provided at a cost that would make it affordable to a vast percentage of today’s housing-challenged workforce.

Since nothing can be built anywhere in the region other than what is specifically permitted pursuant to the respective local zoning ordinances, the current crisis can be attributed directly to the fact that the power to zone was entrusted by the state to local governments free of any restraints that would compel them in any way to take cognizance of the broader regional context of which they are a part.

THE RISE OF ZONING BARRIERS

What needs to happen becomes clear after tracing the current trends to their origins. In this region, the pent-up demand for housing affordable to the tens of thousands of newly demobilized veterans of World War II and their families gave birth to Levittown and other large expanses of homes on relatively small lots that fulfilled their yearning for the “American Dream.” Not long after it began, this trend ran into local zoning ordinances designed to, first, slow down such developments and, soon, to make them impossible altogether by requiring large lots, complicating the process of review of developers’ applications, and finally, by the enactment of a multiplicity of regulations that rendered vast land areas developable only with very low density single-family houses if at all. The result of some 50 years of unhindered evolution of these regulatory trends in the region’s municipalities is a crisis-level shortage of affordable housing. While minor efforts to produce it are still occurring here and

there in spite of the enormous difficulties in the path of developers, the production of affordable units is grossly inadequate and largely limited to a few older municipalities that already contain highly disproportionate numbers of affordable units.



422 Warburton Avenue, Village of Hastings-on-Hudson

Fourteen one, two and three bedroom affordable rental apartments for families. It is the first affordable building in Westchester to utilize geothermal heating. Westchester County provided funding for land acquisition and infrastructure.

THE COURT TAKES A STAND

The need for some degree of discipline in the determination of local residential land use patterns was clearly spelled out in 1975 by the state’s highest court – the New York State Court of Appeals. In Berenson v. Town of New Castle, it decided in favor of a developer who had been denied permission to build townhouses in a municipality all of whose undeveloped land was zoned exclusively for single-family detached houses. In that decision, the court ruled that every municipality, in its zoning, must make provision for the satisfaction of its own housing need as well as for its share of its region’s needs. In the court’s own words, the zoning ordinance must balance “the local desire to maintain the status quo within the community and the greater public interest that regional needs be met.” While that decision did not question the general authority of the municipality to determine the future use of its land, when it comes to residential development, it conditioned that power upon the municipality’s using it in a manner that makes proper provision for all foreseeable housing needs.

A later case – Continental Building Corp. v. Town of North Salem – specified that the municipality’s obligation to provide for a share of the region’s housing needs includes its share of the need for specifically affordable housing.

In light of those decisions, any contention that zoning ordinances that fail to follow the dictate of Berenson are authorized by the state pursuant to home rule would be tantamount to asserting a legal right for municipalities to engage in constitutionally prohibited exclusionary zoning. In Berenson, the Court of Appeals addressed this issue in unmistakable terms, as follows: “While the people of New Castle may fervently desire to be left alone by the forces of change, the ultimate determination is not solely theirs.”

THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Westchester County has determined its affordable housing need for the decade of the 1990s following the 1990 U.S. Census and again for the ensuing 15-year period following the 2000 Census. In 1993, the Westchester County Housing Opportunity Commission adopted a formula whereby the then needed 5,000 affordable units were allocated to each of the county’s 43 municipalities having land use jurisdiction. The total number of units produced during that decade amounted to only 46% of the need; 20 municipalities having produced no units whatsoever. During the first half of the current 2000-2015 need projection period, the rate of production has fallen below that of the prior decade.

The reason for this discouraging level of performance is that, despite the county government’s wholehearted support – which includes funds dedicated to land acquisition for affordable housing as well as meeting some of the infrastructure costs of such developments – its efforts have been frustrated at every turn by its lack of legal authority to affect the land use decisions of its component municipalities.

STATE ACTION NEEDED

Since the mounting affordable housing crisis is attributable primarily to the state’s delegation of unlimited zoning power to local governments, the time is clearly at hand for the state legislature to address it directly by amending the enabling laws that govern zoning in the state’s cities, towns and villages to require that their local ordinances make provision for

the satisfaction of their own and of their share of their region’s affordable housing needs. Both the regional and the local need should be determined by the state using a methodology applicable throughout the state. It is important to note that, in complying with this requirement, municipalities will themselves determine where the needed housing should be located and that they will continue to be protected against any proposed developments that may exert significant unmitigated adverse impacts on the environment by the continued applicability of all the procedural and substantive provisions of the State Environmental Quality Review Act.



James Varrick Homes, City of Mount Vernon

Sixteen two-family owner/renter homes – with all 32 units being affordable. Westchester County provided funding for land acquisition and construction of sidewalks and curbs.

The amended law should recognize that, in some parts of the state – commencing with the seven suburban counties in the New York metropolitan region – the need for facilitating the production of affordable housing is urgent by specifying that in any municipality therein that fails to amend its zoning ordinance to make provision for the satisfaction of its share of the affordable housing need within one year following the state’s determination thereof, affordable housing developments will be permitted anywhere unless the municipality can demonstrate that denial of a proposed affordable housing project would not subvert what the Court of Appeals termed “the greater public interest that regional needs be met.”

Given the clearly predictable and long-proven consequences of regionwide exclusionary municipal zoning, it is nothing short of incredible that the state legislature has failed to move long ago to change the rules of the game. *Continued on next page*

Here, thousands of workers spend ever-growing amounts of time and money commuting vast distances to and from their jobs. New York City – which is considering the elimination of the residency requirement for its unionized workforce – will find that the needed relief from its own high housing prices is simply unattainable within any reasonable commuting distance. The shortage of affordable units is growing due to the creeping expiration of rent limitations in thousands of units built 30 to 40 years ago with public subsidies. Even in many deteriorated neighborhoods, the affordability of many moderately priced units is disappearing due to gentrification.

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE TO ACT

The affordable housing crisis is affecting the economy of the New York metropolitan region whose continued strength is an essential element of the state’s economy. At a time when, to reduce costs, businesses are prone to relocate their production activities to the other end of the world, it would be only logical to expect that they would also not hesitate to move other parts of their operations to where lower housing costs would better fit the earnings of their workforce. As time goes on, continued business-as-usual attempts to deal with the affordable housing crisis will likely produce ever diminishing returns. Removal of the municipalities’ ability to engage in exclusionary zoning seems to be the only measure that will produce positive results. In acting to ease this region’s affordable housing shortage, the state legislature would be acting in the interest of the entire State of New York.

It would also clearly affirm its commitment to the concept that, in the State of New York, the law is what the New York Court of Appeals says it is.



Jacobs Hill, Town of Cortlandt

A development for seniors with 102 one-and-two bedroom rental affordable apartments in four buildings. The multi-level funding included Westchester County funds for land acquisition and infrastructure. The same developer built market rate condominiums for seniors on an adjacent site.



Scotts Ridge, Town of Pound Ridge

A new senior residence that provides 12 efficiency apartments and shared housing facilities in two adjacent buildings. Westchester County provided financial assistance for property acquisition and needed infrastructure improvements including a sidewalk link to the commercial center of Scotts Corners hamlet.

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2008 HOLIDAY PARTY PICTURES







Report from the Federal Policy and Program Briefing

By Michael A. Levine, AICP, Vice President for Intergovernmental Affairs

The Legislative Liaisons from all 51 chapters met to discuss the APA policy agenda for the upcoming congressional session at the 2008 APA Federal Policy and Program Briefing, held October 19 to 21 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The opening day was dominated by discussions on how the federal government would respond to the deepening financial crisis. Speakers ranging from journalists Michael Barone of *U.S. News & World Report* and Alan Greenblatt of *Governing* magazine to public policy specialists such as Scott Pattison of the National Association of State Budget Officers framed the issue largely in terms of what the government can no longer afford to do versus what it cannot afford *not* to do. The financial rescue of the mortgage industry, credit markets and financial services sector were described as necessities, not options, as well as greater investment in transportation infrastructure. Most spoke as though an Obama presidency was all but certain (we now know this to be accurate) and predicted a reversal of the recent trends towards privatization and deregulation.

The second day was devoted to the National Design Professional Infrastructure Summit, cosponsored by APA, the American Institute of Architects and the American Society of Landscape Architects. The CEO's of all three organizations, Paul Farmer, Christine McEntee and Nancy Somerville, respectively, were in attendance to give opening remarks. The tone was considerably more optimistic than that of the prior day. A recurring theme was the hope that a combination of a new, progressive administration and that the necessities borne of the financial crisis will create opportunities for rapid growth in the areas of housing, environmental protection, transportation and green building.

Mr. Farmer suggested that planners were finally poised to have their agenda advanced and urged that this moment in time marks the opportunity for aggressive advocacy. He appeared to be only half-joking when he said he could now envision a time when only multi-family housing would be permitted as-of-right and single-family detached dwellings would be al-

lowed only by special-use permit. To illustrate the drastic difference in attitudes towards public investment, he compared his experiences in Germany, where the national airline actually owns and operates the train to the Frankfurt airport, with a true story from Minneapolis where the dominant local airline successfully lobbied to block construction of a light rail line to that airport. Their rationale: the rail line would cause a decrease in parking revenues that the airport would have to make up by charging higher landing fees to the airlines.

A regular guest at APA functions, Congressman Earl Blumenaur (D-Ore) was the luncheon speaker. The Congressman outlined the goals of the incoming 111th Congress, with particular attention to creating a National Infrastructure Bank and to the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU. While never breaking decorum, Mr. Blumenaur's pointed comments effectively lampooned the current administration's private-sector-can-do-everything-better mentality as well as its well-documented disdain for mass transit and rental housing. The summit concluded with a reception for the opening of the "Green Community" exhibit at the National Building Museum near Capitol Hill.

As always, the third day was devoted to the annual "Planners' Day on Capitol Hill," in which the Legislative Liaisons meet with their congressional delegation to discuss the legislative goals of the organization. The event, however, is usually held in mid-September, not October, prompting several of us to question whether any members of Congress would be in Washington only two weeks before a major election. We expected those that remained, and their key staff, to be in a "let's-wait-and-see" mode but, to our surprise, members of both parties were eager to discuss the changes in policy direction anticipated in the next session. They appeared to be more certain of the electoral outcome than the media polls were indicating at the time.

While the APA is optimistic about advancing its agenda in Washington, the Legislation and Policy Committee will be increasing its focus on legislative activities at the state level in the coming year, and on ballot measures in particular. Opponents of legislation regarding climate change and energy efficiency standards or of increased spending on mass transit and affordable housing are likely to turn to state legislatures for action if the federal government becomes less receptive to their interests.

The Oasis Planner: Life as an Expat Urban Planner in Abu Dhabi

By Eric Wilson

After almost eight years as a public sector land use planner in New York City, Eric Wilson joined the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council in November 2008. The UPC, a new government agency, is charged with rationalizing land use and regulating development throughout Abu Dhabi emirate in the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Wilson is keeping an on-line blog as a record of his personal experiences and observations. With the permission of the author, here are sample entries.

After a few months of planning, the time had finally come to leave New York for Abu Dhabi. I boarded Etihad Flight 100 with nonstop service to Abu Dhabi. While I was looking forward to my adventure with the UPC, the plush business-class amenities did little to ease my sadness at leaving behind my NYC community. Thirteen hours after leaving JFK, I arrived in Abu Dhabi.

Directly after arriving at Abu Dhabi airport, I took a taxi two hours west to Jebel Dhanna in Al Gharbia, Abu Dhabi's Western Region. The UPC had organized a week-long conference (a planning charrette) to discuss the future of Al Gharbia, the largest municipality in the emirate and its source of oil wealth.

The ride from Abu Dhabi on the E-11 (the UAE's main east-west highway along the Gulf coast) is flat, and just far enough inland so that the Arabian Gulf coast is out of view. While irrigated date palms line the highway, there's few desert plants beyond the irrigated strip.

I was never really sure of what I was going to work on when I joined the UPC. During my interview, we discussed Plan Abu Dhabi 2030, which focuses on Abu Dhabi island and the Abu Dhabi mainland areas. As I learned this week, my primary assignment will be to coordinate planning efforts in Al Ain and Al Gharbia. Both of these areas are about to engage in similar planning efforts as Abu Dhabi. The goal will be to produce two documents: Plan Al Ain 2030 and Plan Al Gharbia 2030.

The first step in preparing a UPC 2030 plan is to hold a charrette - a brainstorming exercise that identifies planning opportunities, constraints and an overall

vision. Because Al Gharbia is so large, the goal of this charrette is to identify land use planning themes for both the region and for each of Al Gharbia's small settlements. The charrette officially started the day before I arrived, but I was able to observe and participate in the sessions throughout the week. About 25 experts from all over the world participated, along with UPC staff and representatives from the Al Gharbia regional government. The charrette was one of the most intensive land use planning exercises that I've participated in, both in terms of quality of output and the amount of budget input.



Beach Rotana Hotel

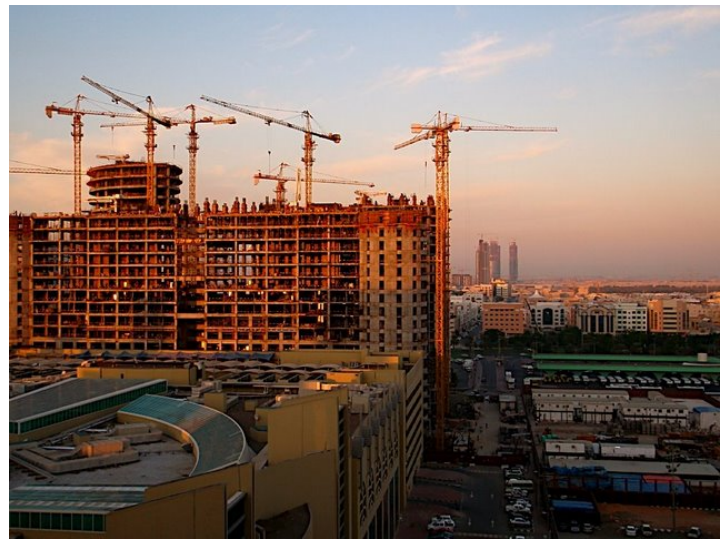
By the end of the week, we had the foundations of a very strong regional plan, bolstered by several settlement plans. The next step will be to present the ideas to the Crown Prince, then set about preparing the document and devising an implementation plan.

After a final buffet breakfast at the Danat Resort, we headed onto the desert highway east to Abu Dhabi city. The open flat desert eventually yielded to the evolving sprawl and tangling highways on the Abu Dhabi mainland just outside the island. Eventually we crossed a bridge over the shallow Al Maqta ford into Abu Dhabi island.

I checked into the hotel, home for my first month in the city. From my hotel window on the 14th floor, I see the city's older rugby stadium and central taxi stand. I get a sense of the flatness of the city and the pastel-painted cement and glass that shape Abu Dhabi's buildings.

Continued on next page

I feel like these buildings have been baked in the sun of summers past. Beyond the structures immediately behind the hotel, I get a clear picture of how Abu Dhabi is changing. The older structures sit surrounded by a backdrop of new construction. In the distance the towers of Al Reem Island are just getting their glass exterior skin installed.



While there are many physical features of Abu Dhabi which immediately struck me, the following stood out the most (I'm being very plannerly here):

1. Scale: The buildings that line the main streets are consistently tall. It seems that most buildings constructed before 2000 are about 16 to 20 stories tall. New buildings are even taller. In general, buildings in the middle of the megablocks are much smaller.

2. Megablocks: Abu Dhabi city is laid out in a grid of gigantic megablocks. While each megablock is divided into multiple local streets that can be easy to walk around, large highway-like roads separate adjacent megablocks. It takes a while for pedestrians to travel from one megablock to another. Most planners use the rule that people walk about a 1/4 mile (1,320 feet) in 5 minutes. My hotel occupies a megablock with a frontage of 3,500 feet. Pedestrians can cross the streets at lights at either end of the megablock or in midblock pedestrian underpasses.



3. Retail: Each of the megablocks are lined with large and small retailers of every type. Because each building stands alone (there are no shared “party walls” like in New York), the retail can wrap around all four sides of a building’s ground floor. There are frequent restaurants and cafes which have seating that spills out into the sidewalk in front. These seating areas are especially active at night and where parking has not consumed all the space in front of the cafe. Of course, there is a whole world of retail in the malls that I have yet to explore.

4. Recreational spaces: While the roadway medians are very well landscaped, there are a few recreational spaces that are heavily used after the sun goes down. A great example of an urban park is Capital Garden, complete with an outdoor sheesha cafe. Users must pay 1 dirham (about 27 cents) to get into Capital Garden. Another type of recreational space is pretty informal, occurring in less maintained areas adjacent to retail uses.



5. Street signs: Abu Dhabi has a unique street sign system. The system is complicated because each street has a number and usually at least two names. Drivers of the few taxis that I've been in don't use the numbers or the names - you have to provide directions to a landmark near where you want to go (for example, I say that I want to go to Al Wahdah Mall, then walk to the hotel from where I get dropped off). Large blue signs are used to show the large streets surrounding each megablock. There's also another kind of sign used for the smaller streets within the megablock, which have their own numbering system. Beyond the street signs, there is a system of navigational signs and addresses. No one (at least taxi drivers or the postal service) seems to use this system. The signs are generally located on the corners of each megablock. Presumably, they show the name of the megablock and its "zone" and "sector." There are also small address signs on most buildings. As far as I know, these are not used by anyone.



Pedestrian Underpass

Getting used to Sunday being the first day of the work week isn't as easy as I thought it was going to be. I'm still anxious that I'll forget the work week starts on Sunday and show up on Monday looking a little foolish. That said, the first official day in the office went well. The office is a short walk from the hotel in a three-story building complex that houses several other public sector offices. One aspect of the office that I've found particularly exciting is the beverage service. Our beverage man makes tea, cappuccino or even fruit cocktail drinks with avocado, mango and pomegranate flavors. He brings these upon request to office staff in offices and during every meeting. Clearly I'm going to take advantage of this!

To check out the latest from Eric Wilson in Abu Dhabi, visit <http://wilsonerh.wordpress.com/>

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How Frederick Law Olmsted Got the Central Park Job

By Leonardo Vazquez, AICP/PP
Director of The Leading Institute, Rutgers University
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy



2008 is the 150th anniversary of the awarding of the job to create Central Park, the first and still the foremost major park in New York City. Central Park launched Olmsted's famous career in planning and landscape architecture and became a model for

other urban open spaces throughout the United States. Olmsted's story sounds too Hollywood to be true – a struggling farmer, B-list writer and failed businessman from the backwoods of Staten Island gets picked by Manhattan's elite to steward their city's emerald of open spaces. But it's quite logical, and provides some lessons for how we can be successful.

Like Leonardo Da Vinci and Thomas Jefferson, Olmsted was a man of many talents. Among them was building connections with influential people. He was born to a comfortable family in Connecticut, but was an outsider when he moved to what is today New York City's borough of Staten Island. After buying a farm there, he formed a small club of farmers, and from there the Richmond County Agricultural Society. He made himself the president of the group.

Olmsted increased his visibility by getting letters and announcements published in local publications, such as the now defunct *Staten Islander*. Finding the agricultural life too constraining, Olmsted and his brother, set out to explore the cities of England. While there, he got the opportunity to write a few articles for the *Hartford Courant*. That started him on the road to being a journalist and writer.

In 1857, while working on a book, Olmsted met a member of the commission chosen to pick the first superintendent for what would become Central Park. Olmsted talked enthusiastically about the value of such a park, and the man invited him to apply for the

job. Meeting the commissioner was lucky. What Olmsted did afterwards was strategic. He reached out through his network to support his candidacy. "Since his activities in recent years had brought him into contact with men of prominent and various affairs," says biographer Laura Wood Roper, "he had no difficulty in collecting a number of imposing sponsors." By a vote of eight to one, Olmsted was chosen as superintendent to manage the creation of the park.

Now that he had proven himself a good campaigner, Olmsted had to demonstrate excellent political skills. New York City at the time was run by the Tammany Hall political machine, part of the Democrat party. The New York State Legislature had taken control of the park away from New York and given it to a Commission made up mostly of Republicans. As superintendent, Olmsted reported to an engineer-in-chief, Egbert Viele, who was chosen when the commission was in Tammany Hall hands. Many of the workers were hired as patronage assignments and were there to help in elections, not park building. Olmsted worked hard in the field and showed a thick skin to the taunts and jokes of the employees. When the Commission fired workers and hired new ones to soothe the anger of unemployed men during a difficult economy, Olmsted used these opportunities to get and retain competent workers.

After the commission chose a superintendent, it held a competition to design the park. Olmsted was asked by architect Calvert Vaux to team up with him to enter the competition. Being politically smart, Olmsted tested the waters to see if Viele would object. He didn't. Vaux and Olmsted jointly developed the design, called Greensward, that became Central Park.

The winning design gave no credit to any individual, so it wasn't clear who contributed which piece. And this is another factor in Olmsted's success: though he was personally ambitious, he also knew teamwork and understood when the whole was bigger than the sum of its parts.

Olmsted was what we might call today a reflective practitioner – someone who asked deep questions about his own work and wanted to learn more about more things. And this helped him to go beyond park planning into public health and community planning. If it wasn't for the connections he made, his communication skills, and his being a reflective practitioner,

Continued on next page

Olmsted would be remembered, if at all, as another struggling farmer in a rural hamlet in southern New York State.

“Nothing in his record – a farmer who had not made his farms pay, a writer who had made nothing but reputation, a publisher who had gone bankrupt – suggested his capacities,” Roper says. But he had “the vision to grasp complex problems, the acuity to analyze them, the balance to see the whole and the parts in proportion, and the discipline and imagination to devise solutions.”

What are the lessons for our practice and careers?

Get involved and get connected. If it’s a choice between participating in that urban design committee meeting and sharpening up another demographic table in a long report – go to the meeting.

Build your leadership skills. Olmsted could have been just another brilliant thinker who got crushed by political realities. Olmsted knew that being smart was not enough.

Be reflective and explore deep questions. Don’t just think about how and what you do. Ask yourself: Why? Why not? What would happen if...?

Be open to ideas from a diverse array of people. When was the last time you asked the office manager or someone in the mailroom to comment on your proposed plan?

There are many books and websites about Olmsted’s life and work. The author recommends FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted, by Laura Wood Roper. This article first appeared on www.Planetizen.com. Central Park was designated a Great Public Space by APA in 2008.



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Long Island Section

The next APA Metro Chapter LI Section Steering Committee Meeting will be held on Friday, January 16, 2009 at 12:00 PM at Cameron Engineering's Woodbury office: **100 Sunnyside Blvd.** Typically, LI-APA Steering Committee meetings are held on the second Friday of each month; January's meeting date is an exception. Please RSVP (we order pizza) to: LongIslandSection@nyplanning.org

APA Scholarship Announcement

The APA Metro Chapter Long Island Section will award Arthur Kunz Memorial scholarships to up to three entry-level planners (less than three years out of college or less than three years in a professional planning position) to attend the National Planning Conference in Minneapolis in April 2009. The scholarship will pay for conference registration, APA membership for one year, and some additional expenses. In the spirit of Mr. Kunz, a Suffolk County planner and mobile workshop enthusiast, the scholarship will also fund attendance at one mobile workshop. If you are an entry-level planner from Long Island or working on Long Island and wish to apply for a scholarship to attend the 2009 conference, send your resume and why you are interested in an email to LongIslandSection@nyplanning.org.

Please spread the word to co-workers, colleagues, and any entry-level planners who may be interested in this unique opportunity. It will no doubt be an experience to learn more about national planning issues and provide an opportunity to meet other professionals in the field.

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Remember Freedomland USA?

From Wikipedia:

Freedomland U.S.A. (usually just called Freedomland) was a short-lived, themed amusement park in the Baychester area in the northeastern part of the Borough of The Bronx; its slogan was "The World's Largest Entertainment Center" (later, "The World's Largest Outdoor Family Entertainment Center"). *Freedomland* opened on June 19, 1960. It closed at the end of the 1964 season when it failed to make a profit.

Freedomland was built on the site of a former municipal landfill. Although the property was spread out over 205 acres, the actual amusement park itself was just 85 acres - larger than Disneyland's 65 acres. The park could accommodate 32,000 visitors at one time (90,000 during the course of a day) and boasted 8 miles of navigable waterways and lakes, 10,000 newly planted trees, 18 restaurants and snack bars and parking for 72,000 cars. It cost \$65 million to build. The area was a swampy one connecting the Hutchinson River and the drainage into Westchester Creek, and was not entirely filled. This led to a profusion of mosquitoes during much of the season. The swampy bottom would later complicate the construction of Co-op City.

Freedomland was built at a time when the traditional New York City amusement area of Coney Island was in a state of continuing decline. Unlike Coney Island, Freedomland was highly accessible by automobile; however, it was difficult to access by the heavily used New York City subway system, requiring a connecting bus ride after taking an isolated subway line to the last stop. Coney Island, by contrast, was (and is) directly served by four separate subway lines. Coney Island's last integrated amusement park, Steeplechase Park, closed in 1964, the same year as Freedomland.



Call for APA NY Metro Chapter 2009 Award Nominations

Each year, the APA NY Metro Chapter bestows recognition on individuals, organizations and projects that exemplify the best of the metropolitan region's planning work. Given at the Chapter's Annual Meeting, the awards are meant to highlight excellence in the field and inspire planners of the next generation.

The APA NY Metro Chapter awards encompass a variety of achievements and include recognition for seasoned leaders as well as those just beginning to make their mark. Projects in the private and public sectors qualify, as well as community-based and civic advocacy initiatives. Innovation and impact are highly valued as are those initiatives that demonstrate collaboration and education. Projects at all scales are equally considered.

- **Lawrence M. Orton Award** for leadership in city and regional planning.
- **Paul Davidoff Award** for leadership in housing and equal opportunity.
- **Andrew Haswell Green Award*** to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions for a period of at least 15 years.
- **Meritorious Service or Achievement Award** to recognize work of unusual merit or achievement.
- **Journalism Award** (for print, broadcast, or web-based work)
- **William H. White Award** for creativity and ingenuity in planning.

**formerly the Distinguished Service Award*

Further information can be found at: <http://www.nyplanning.org/chawards.html>

Nomination Deadline: Friday, February 27, 2009

Nominations should be submitted to Mike Bradley (michael.bradley@parks.nyc.gov) and Ellen Ryan (eryan@planning.nyc.gov), Co-Chairs of the Awards Committee.

Nominations should include:

- Your name and contact information
- Name of nominated individual(s), organization or project and contact information
- Category of award nomination
- Short narrative explanation for nomination

Upcoming Events

American Planning Association
New York Metro Chapter

2009 APA MONTHLY WEBCAST SERIES

Earn up to 18 CM credits from your own computer through these monthly webcasts at no cost to APA members.

APA NY Metro Chapter has joined with other APA chapters to co-sponsor a series of 12 webcasts at 1.5 CM credits per webcast.

The first webcast starts on **Friday, January 9, 2009, 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm ET** and continues on the first Fridays of the following 11 months at the same time.

SPECIAL NOTE: Registration is limited to the first 1,000 people that register online for a webcast.

For more information, go to <http://www.utah-apa.org/webcasts.htm>
(HIT CTRL AND CLICK LINK)

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RSVP to office@nyplanning.org

Wednesday, January 28, 2009
6:00 - 7:30 PM

Executive Committee Meeting Schedule

January 12

February 9

March 16

April 20

May 18

June (Annual Meeting)

11 Park Place, Suite 701, New York, NY

How Zoning Makes Buildings

A panel discussion on the policies and procedures of the New York City Department of Buildings and Department of City Planning in the interpretation of zoning regulations.

Monday, January 26, 2009 (6-8pm)

Free of charge: Qualifies for AICP CM credits and AIA credits.

Panelists:

Department of Buildings:

James Colgate, Esq. - *Acting Assistant Commissioner for Technical Affairs and Code Development*

Department of City Planning:

Thomas Wargo – *Director, Zoning Division*

American Institute of Architects:

Mark Ginsberg, FAIA – *Partner, Curtis + Ginsberg Architects LLP*

American Planning Association:

Marcie Kesner, AICP - *Planning and Development Specialist, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP*

Moderator:

Michael Kwartler, FAIA - *Michael Kwartler & Associates*

Location: AIA Center for Architecture, 536 Laguardia Place (between Bleecker Street and West 3rd Street)

Sponsored by: American Planning Association (Metro Chapter) and American Institute of Architects (New York Chapter)

RSVP: Please respond to Zachary Bernstein, APA Zoning Committee Chair at: Zachary.Bernstein@friedfrank.com

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E-mail news, articles and suggestions to editor@nyplanning.org. You must include METROPLANNER in the subject line.

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