The pursuit of a sustainable future and climate mitigation and adaptation—in areas such as housing, land use, economic development, transportation, public health, resiliency, and environmental protection—is a critical imperative for our communities, our regions, our country, and the entire world. It is a pursuit that challenges the planning profession to adapt its practices in order to holistically incorporate the demands of sustainability across the many policy, legislative, and jurisdictional silos in which planners do their work.

In recognition of the challenge inherent in planning for sustainability, the American Planning Association (APA) New York Metro Chapter hosted a workshop to explore the feasibility of change within the profession and the way that change might be accomplished. Through the workshop, the Chapter sought to marshal the experiences and insights of its members to optimize the profession’s role in the pursuit of sustainability. By harnessing the energy and creativity of our communities and our technologies, it could be possible to craft wide-ranging solutions to the crucial problems that we all currently face.

The workshop summarized in this document could potentially inform a subsequent initiative in the future to continue addressing the impacts of silos on planning for a sustainable future.

Thank you to our sponsors for their generous support of the APA NY Metro Chapter.
The workshop began an exploration of potential changes to planning practice that could facilitate meeting the challenges of future sustainability. The workshop was attended by a number of APA NY Metro Chapter members, whose professional responsibilities included the following:

- Participants worked in a range of sectors, including state, regional, and local governmental sectors; private sector/consulting; and the non-profit sector.
- The greatest number of participants worked in the private/consulting sector, followed by local government. Relatively few participants indicated that their work was in state, regional, or non-profit sectors.
- A cross-tabulation exercise during the workshop revealed that the largest number of participants worked in private consulting for transportation, environmental assessment, and urban design, followed by local governmental work related to transportation and to housing.
- The areas of specialization among the participants varied. The greatest number specialized in transportation, followed by an environmental specialization. Other specializations represented included urban design, housing, and economic/community development. Only one participant reported a specialization in land use & zoning.

The workshop was organized as follows:

- An initial plenary session that explored the meaning of “sustainability” to the participants, their perspective on its importance to the planning profession, and their understanding of policy and professional “silos.”
- The presentation of a case study of sustainability planning to provide background context.
- A series of breakout groups that explored how the profession might adapt its practices in pursuit of a sustainable future.

The output of the workshop was recorded and organized. The following summary presents these outputs organized by topical area and reflects the opinions stated during the workshop. This document could inform subsequent work but does not represent a position by the APA NY Metro Chapter.
IMPACTS ON PLANNERS AND PLANNING PRACTICE

THE PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBED THE IMPERATIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN OUR WORLD TODAY AS AFFECTING PLANNERS AND PLANNING PRACTICE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION IN PROBLEM SOLVING

Planning for a sustainable future requires planners to be flexible in order to optimize solutions over multiple goals and priorities and projects with multiple priorities.

DURABILITY

Planning for a sustainable future requires that planners increase the durability of communities, facilities, and equipment beyond currently assumed life-cycles, moving beyond sustainability toward regeneration.

ADAPTABILITY

Sustainability planning requires that planners adapt planning practice to minimize harm and hazard while optimizing use of resources, being sensitive to community benefits, and localizing production of goods and services.

EQUITY OF ACCESS

A truly sustainable future requires planners to ensure equitable access to the development of that future.

PERSPECTIVE

Sustainability planning requires that planners adapt planning practice to accommodate the needs of future generations.
THE ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

The participants describing the following elements of planning for a sustainable future:

ENERGY AND RESOURCE CONSUMPTION

Minimization of energy and resource consumption is an important element of sustainability planning. Specific areas identified included energy production, human and social activities, food systems, and transportation of people and goods. Minimized consumption must be accomplished in an equitable fashion.

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Ecosystem services are key elements of sustainability planning, including protection of air and water quality, attention to ecology and natural systems, protection of biodiversity, and maintaining the health of wetlands.

PHYSICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE

These aspects of resilience are a significant element of sustainability planning, both in response to climate stressors and as a means of navigating social and economic transitions to enhance sustainability. The resilience of physical infrastructure requires enhanced life-cycle planning. Social resilience was seen as including planning for mobility, access, and circulation in response to stressors and transitions. In the same vein, economic resilience and sustainability are focused on both stressors and transitions.

REASONS FOR POLICY AND PLANNING SILOS

Planning and policy silos result from specialization of knowledge and expertise through planning or policy disciplines and related training, academic or otherwise. Planning and policy disciplines were also seen as establishing specialized frameworks for undertaking work and analyzing problems that function as “firewalls” against being overwhelmed by information. In part, as a result of areas of specialization, the participants saw professional practices and traditions as further reinforcing silos through standards of professional integrity and feelings of pride and accomplishment instilled in members of a given discipline.

Political systems, political parties, and political ideologies create silos of political jurisdiction and governing perspective. Political silos were seen as imposing a temporal dimension on planning processes as political timeframes are largely focused on the duration of elected terms of office, thus constraining policy development and implementation as well as perspective. The point was made that natural systems in particular do not function within political timeframes. Additionally, with the rollback of federal environmental protections, the jurisdictional issue becomes more important as state and local governments attempt to counter new federal policies.

Generational and demographic factors influence planning and policy silos by introducing differing levels of culture, information, understanding, perspective, participation, and ideology into planning and policy arenas.
IMPACTS OF SILOS ON SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

THE PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED TWO BROAD AREAS IN WHICH SILOS AFFECT AND CHALLENGE PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY:

- By blocking interaction between and among the various elements or functional/policy components of a planning issue or project; and
- By fragmenting the resources that may be available to address a planning issue or undertake a planning project.

The participants saw silos as creating barriers to all parties working together on functional/policy components of a planning issue or project to develop cross-sectoral solutions. They also serve to diminish cultural identities in the development of solutions by fragmenting them across the various sectors. On the resource side, silos reinforce competition for available resources as well as obscuring resources that might be brought to bear to address a planning issue based on jurisdiction, location, and policy area.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF SILOS ON PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE, PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED:

- Improved communication and coordination through project or issue management; and
- Place-based policy development through techniques such as generic environmental impact statements.

Practical solutions suggested in these areas include establishing political priority and support for sustainability planning by overcoming silos through project/issue management. Participants felt that political priority could be attained through political leadership and/or through specific legislation and/or regulation. Political will was seen as enabling agency and community leaders to overcome silos in the management of projects or policy issues.

Partnerships between planning and policy practitioners, established through the various planning and policy professions themselves, are critical to overcoming the impacts of silos for the benefit of future sustainability. These partnerships can improve communication and coordination in project and issue management, as well as develop place-based approaches that breach silos and improve sustainability planning.

During the workshop, it was noted that a potential step to address the impacts of silos is to promulgate guidance within professions/disciplines as well as best practices to be applied to integrate planning policy issues and projects.