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Winter 2015 News

In this issue . . .
More news on the Tech Side of Planning

- Improving City Services: Apps Across Wisconsin
- Online public engagement platforms
- New APA-Wisconsin Website Features
- Coming Soon: New Chapter-Only Membership Options

AICP Pass Rates

New Research on Planning Skills

Law Update

Thanks to our conference coordinator, Deb Nemeth, the conference committee and our conference sponsors, including the Association of Wisconsin Regional Planning Commissions and the planning firms shown above. It was a great one-day workshop. The stories in this issue of the newsletter continue the theme of looking at the Tech Side of Planning.

Back to top

Improving City Services: There's an App for That

By Lydia Statz, Student Editor
**University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee**

Cities of all sizes have long had ways for citizens to report a concern to city hall, whether it's a dedicated phone line or a special button on the website. But as the lives of their residents change, many cities have begun to adapt, finding ways to put residents in constant contact with their government.

City-sponsored smartphone apps are popping up all over the map, hoping to take advantage of a highly-connected citizenry. The City of Milwaukee launched "MKE Mobile" in September 2014, joining other major cities nationwide in a growing trend.

The app, available free for iPhone and Android devices, allows residents to file a report directly from their phone, as well as providing vital information about parking and waste collection at a glance. The services available through the app change based on the time of year, with information about leaf collection available in the fall, and the ability to report unshoveled sidewalks during the winter.

Since the September launch, the app has been downloaded approximately 3,000 times, and 400 service requests have come in through the channel. The city's Chief Information Officer Nancy Olson said the city is happy with the response thus far, noting the app adds vital convenience compared to the city's existing hotline and website.

"You may download the app but you don't necessarily have a service you submit right then," Olson said. "But, if you're out for dinner on, say, the near south side and you see some graffiti, you can send it to us on a Sunday night. You don't have to wait until the call center is open or until you're home to log onto the city website."
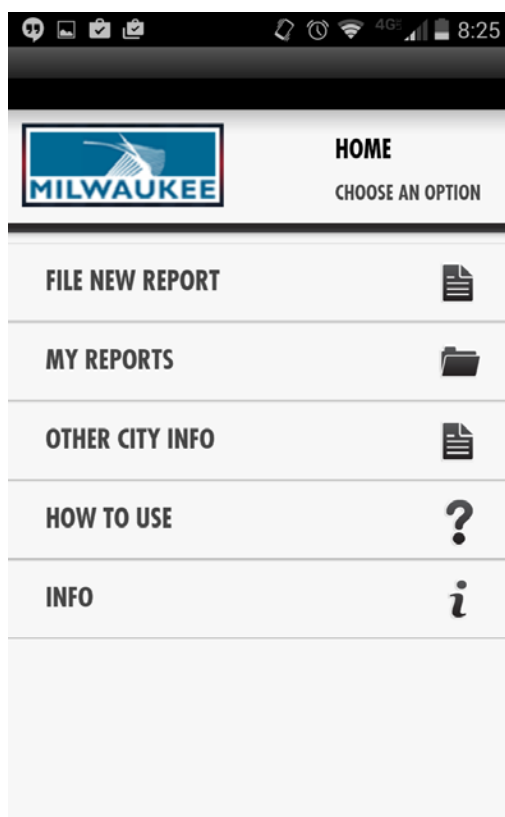
All Milwaukee service requests are routed the same way, whether they come in through the app, website, or phone hotline. Using the app may not be faster, but it does have another advantage. The system stores your reports, allowing you to check on their status at any time and even sending you an email when they've been completed.

Olson said this constant contact between citizens and the city is not only a convenience factor for both officials and citizens, it's come to be expected.

"We take a lot of phone calls, so it's just another way to interact with the citizens as well as maybe offload some of these manual processes," Olson said. "It's a technical, mobile world these days and it's the expectation of people to be able to interact with people on their mobile device."

Small Cities Go Mobile App, Too

Residents of major metro areas certainly have come to expect it, but smaller cities are increasingly jumping on the mobile app bandwagon as well. Earlier this year Wisconsin Rapids launched its municipal app, using the vendor "SeeClickFix."

Mayor Zach Vruwink, who was the city's youngest mayor when he was elected in 2012, said a city of its size embracing new technology trends shouldn't be surprising.

"Large urban metro areas have the same challenges that micropolitan areas do," Vruwink said. "We do this already and our system was pretty analog. It was a very inefficient system."
Vruwink, who comes from a technology background, ran on a platform of modernizing city hall. He said the city aims to offer more services online, including GIS information, to appeal not only to private citizens, but to attract business leaders as well and help city officials to become more efficient.

"If we don't have our things online for folks who are going to do business, we are at a significant disadvantage," he said. "Hopefully one of the greater benefits (of the app) will be the opportunities to sharpen or hone our GIS around some of these citizen service requests. Maybe help city governments find those extra layers of data that we need to be tracking."

He noted that some in Wisconsin Rapids were wary of opening the doors to such open communication. Ultimately, they were convinced that openness was the key to success.

"Do we really want to know all the bad stuff? Well, absolutely. It's a chance for us to correct it," Vruwink said. "This empowers residents. Close that loop, and have a two-way conversation…We all want to know that government is listening to us, and this app helps us to do that more effectively."

Though Wisconsin Rapids was the first in Wisconsin to launch a SeeClickFix app, Vruwink said other cities have since begun investigating the platform as a possibility for their own application.

Back to top

Back to top

Online Public Engagement Platforms

By Nancy Frank, Editor
Associate Professor
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

For years, I have worried about the potential for online civic engagement tools to further disenfranchise lower-income residents, who may lack good access to the internet. Today, while online engagement cannot substitute for face-to-face meetings with citizens, I am convinced that no truly inclusive public engagement effort can ignore online participation.

According the U.S. Census, "in 2013, 74.4 percent of all households reported Internet use, with 73.4 percent reporting a high-speed connection" (http://www.census.gov/content /dam/Census/library/publications/2014/acs /acs-28.pdf). Smartphones further expand the number of people with ready access to the internet. According to the Pew Research Center (http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06

Take a quick peek at ten platforms
Read short descriptions of each
or link directly to the tools

MindMixer
Peak Democacy
Urban Interactive Studio
Delib
Crowdbrite
IdeaScale
PlaceSpeak
Citizen Participation Suite
MetroQuest

New features on some of these platforms (Peak Democracy, for example) also have features that prevent "gaming" the system. Recently, for example, an online poll in the Milwaukee area was undermined when it clearly had been subject to an activist voting hundreds of times in an online poll.

The Peak Democracy conference presentation also described how the mobile version of a community's site can be taken to the streets on a tablet, which has the added advantages of reaching the hard-to-reach and getting their email addresses for the city database. Other platforms also support this approach.

/05/smartphone-ownership-2013/), 56 percent of Americans own smartphones. Moreover, African-Americans and Latinos report even higher rates of smartphone ownership, at over 60 percent. Low-income households are somewhat less likely to own smartphones, at 43-52 percent ownership rates.

Communities in Wisconsin that have used some of these systems include Pleasant Prairie, Eau Claire, Wausau, and the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (all links here are to their civic engagement sites).

Back to top

Public engagement platforms, especially those that provide mobile-friendly versions, may be the best way to reach younger members of your community, especially those under 30 and those with young children. Low-income people may also welcome the opportunity to participate online, given hectic work schedules in today's job market with lots of low-income workers holding multiple part-time jobs.

Back to top

A Rundown of Civic Engagement Platforms

Here's a quick peek at the functions of these online civic engagement platforms. Except where noted, all quotes are from Rucker and Whalen, http://wiseeconomy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Online-Engagement-Platforms-White-Paper-WEW-NWPE-11-09-12.pdf). The white paper includes 2012 pricing information as well. Several of these tools claim to be the "most widely used" civic platform tool. Click here to return to the list of links to the marketing websites for each tool listed below.

MindMixer "functions primarily through the system of idea generation, seconding, and responding to the ideas of others, [but includes] new features such as survey capabilities and photo sharing." MindMixer also offers links on its website to three featured sites, allowing prospective users to get a feel for what the tool can do (http://mindmixer.com/communities/civic/)

Peak Democacy's **Open Town Hall** boasts its tools for keeping civic engagement civil as well as special tools for interactive maps and assessing citizen priorities with a participatory "budget" tool. "Participants are only allowed to comment once per topic - a measure that helps ensure participants cannot dominate conversation, or argue and attack one another. It also includes the sort of survey and citizen comment features found in MindMixer."

Urban Interactive Studio's **Engaging Plans** platform: "This platform allows clients to disseminate information about projects or policies to stakeholders, as well as collect feedback and ideas about these projects and policies from community members."

Delib offers three mobile apps: Budget Simulator, Citizen Space, and Dialogue Apps. The Citizen Space app is designed for "managing, publicizing, and archiving all public feedback activity" rather than for collecting that feedback. The Dialogue app is more like MindMixer.

Crowdbrite offers "an online charette—a participatory, design-oriented workshop in which community members play an active role in designing a project or plan . . . by writing comments on virtual sticky notes" as well as uploading photos and videos of ideas they love or hate.

IdeaScale "is the least public-policy centric platform discussed in [the Rucker and Whalen] paper. It was "created for commercial clients around the idea of using crowd sourcing to manage and moderate the information about a project, policy, or company." Rucker and Whalen note that "Ideascale is sometimes used by local governments that are attracted by its very low costs (in some cases less than $100/month [in 2012])," but it lacks the graphic and spatial components found in many of the tools designed specifically for local government and planning applications.

PlaceSpeak was only available in a beta version when Rucker and Whalen did their research. A "distinguishing characteristic of PlaceSpeak is that it requires users to first input their residential address so the program can link user identities with geographic locations." The PlaceSpeak website lists over fifteen case studies where their platform has been used by cities or community groups.

Citizen Participation Suite by Granicus offers two platforms: CivicIdeas and eComment. CivicIdeas is the program aimed at generating and sharing ideas among community members. Like many of the other platforms discussed in this paper, CivicIdeas allows participants to post ideas, and vote, share and comment on the ideas of others." The eComment tools is designed to allow citizens to comment at public hearing without attending in person. Citizens may leave either "citizens to leave either written or video messages on the various agenda items."

MetroQuest offers tools similar to the others above. In addition, it is one of the platforms that is designed to support "kiosks and interactive workshops presented as live meetings. Kiosks are placed at meeting locations and government offices, where desired, to allow stakeholders to give their input while attending meetings or civic functions.

Back to top

Back to top

Check Out Our New APA-WI Website
By Lydia Statz, Student Editor
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

We took our Spring Workshop theme seriously and decided to upgrade our own technology here at APA-Wisconsin. Exhibit 1: You are reading this on our new online newsletter platform. Exhibit 2: Earlier this month we unveiled our brand new website, including many new features we're excited to share.
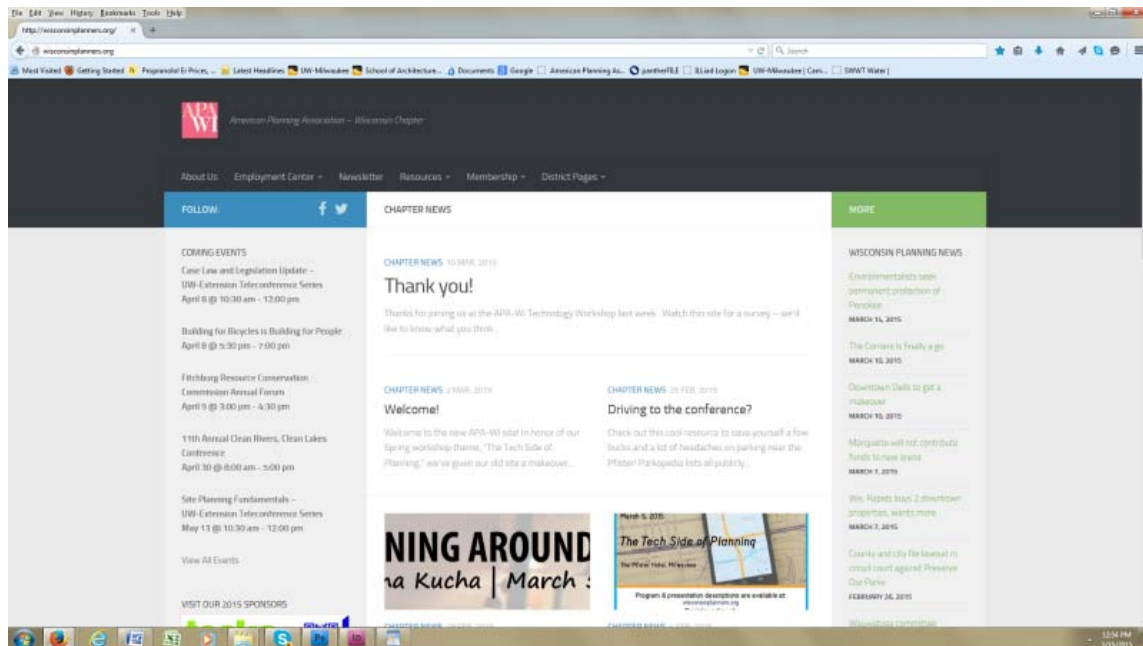
The foremost goal of the redesign was offering all of the same information on our old site in a sleeker, more easily navigable package. Through a thorough reorganization, the new site should make it easier to find the information you're looking for at a glance, while a greater focus on visual content keeps the homepage feeling fresh and inviting.

New Features: Events Calendar, Newsfeed, and District Pages

The transition to a new platform also allowed us to add several new features. Immediately on the homepage, visitors will notice a new events calendar. The calendar provides an easy way to keep track of upcoming continuing education (or social) events happening around the state, and even provides a way to export them to your local calendar. Also on the homepage is a newsfeed, updated regularly with stories about projects occurring around the state.

Beginning in 2015, the chapter will also begin accepting chapter-only membership enrollments and renewals online instead of needing to work through the national chapter (see story in this issue). In turn, this feature may allow us to offer exclusive content to our members in the future, reducing the number of "free riders".

And finally, a major new added feature are the district pages. Each chapter district representative will be given a page on the site to update with district news and information. Southwest district rep Jason Valerius acted as our "guinea pig" for this project and has already set up a nice page. We hope other districts will follow soon.

Though we are pleased with new site so far, it is still in its early days. We hope you will explore it, share your thoughts about the website and the new newsletter format, and please let us know if you run into any problems. Just email Nancy Frank at frankn@uwm.edu with questions, corrections, or comments.

Editor's Note: I owe a huge debt of thanks to Lydia Statz, who began thinking about overhauling the website for us even before she began her graduate assistantship this fall. She researched, planned and implemented the entire project single-handedly with only the lightest supervision from me. Thanks, also, to Linda Stoll for her leadership in moving the chapter's technology upgrades forward. Nancy Frank

Back to top

Back to top

Coming Soon: New Chapter Only Membership Options

Last year, the chapter launched an effort to increase chapter-only membership for those planners for whom the National APA membership is a poor fit. For many planners and planning-related professionals (urban designers, landscape architects, economic development professionals, etc.), their primary organizational loyalties are in related disciplines.

Chapter-only membership provides a way for them to remain plugged into the planning community in Wisconsin at an affordable rate.   This has always been possible. The chapter simply made it more obvious on our website.

This effort is continuing in 2015 with two new initiatives. First, the process of signing up for chapter-only membership is cumbersome, requiring a prospective member to download and print a paper form and then mail it back to APA.

Chapter President Linda Stoll and Vice President for Membership, Rich Kedzior, wanted a process for joining the chapter that people could complete online or on their mobile devices. In addition, the chapter has wanted to attract planning commissioners and students at any of our Wisconsin universities offering planning courses but not offering an accredited degree. Planning commissioners receive a reduced rate from APA, but it is still too much for many communities to pay. Student memberships are offered to any full-time student by APA, but only students at accredited programs are eligible for a year of free APA membership.

To address these needs, the chapter will be offering a very low-cost organizational membership for local governments and regional planning commissions and for academic institutions. For just $50 per year, a government organization or academic institution will be able to subscribe as many citizen planners or students as they want to the Wisconsin Chapter. Professional planners will still need to opt for either the $45 chapter-only individual membership or the APA National membership that includes the state chapter dues.

This new membership program will be launched sometime this spring. Please watch for further details about this program.

Back to top

Planning Commissioners

City Council Members

City Managers

City Engineers

Undergraduate Students

Graduate Students not in an accredited planning program

AICP Pass Rates

Once again, graduates of the two accredited masters planning programs in Wisconsin, UW-Madison's URPL program and UW-Milwaukee's MUP program, achieved AICP pass rates well above the national average. From 2004 to 2014, the national pass rate was 76%, but the URPL program smashed that statistic with a whopping 98 percent pass rate and UWM posted a more than respectable 81 percent pass rate, higher than Harvard and the University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign. You can check out your alma mater at https://www.planning.org/certification/passrates/

Back to top

Back to top

Planning Skills: A New Research Study

Every few years, one or another group of planning academics conduct research to better understand the skills that practicing planners need. The more recent effort in this genre has been published by Greenlee, Edwards, and Anthony in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*.

In proper academic fashion, the authors summarize the findings of earlier studies. The most recent were completed in 1999 and 2003. The results of the studies consistently find that the most highly valued skills are communication, including good people skills, and "generic work-based skills like the ability to complete work on time and be a self-starter" (Greenlee, Edwards and Anthony 2015, 2).

The researchers surveyed practicing planners and planning faculty and asked about both knowledge and skills needed for planning. Forty-three percent of planners ranked knowledge of community development as the most important area of knowledge for their own work, followed by economic development, physical planning, and transportation.

In terms of skills, a key finding is that the skills that planners look for when hiring an entry-level planner are quite different than those that the respondents used as senior-level planners. Writing, oral communication, synthesis, interaction with others, and research skills, however, ranked high for

planners at *any* stage of their career. Visual communication and information retrieval skills also received high ratings.

Interestingly—especially in light of our recent conference focus on technology in planning, senior planners viewed knowledge of the internet and social media as less important at the senior level, but more important for entry-level planners.

In light of their findings about what skills planners deem important and what planning faculty say they seek to teach, the authors conclude (p. 9):

"Our main finding is that even though there are significant differences between what practitioners want and academics value, overall, the supply of planning skills more or less matches skills demanded by the planning profession. Furthermore, supply is more closely aligned with those skills ranked as important for planning directors and managers and less aligned with skills ranked as important for entry-level planners. For planning educators, this suggests that despite all the changes in the environment and complexity of planning practice, planning pedagogy is still able to deliver throughout the arc of a planning career."

Source: *Andrew J. Greenlee, Mary Edwards, and Jerry Anthony (2015) Planning Skills: An Examination of Supply and Local Government Demand. Journal of Planning Education and Research, pp. 1-13. Published by Sage. Full text can be downloaded at* http://jpe.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/03/09/0739456X15570321.full. *A fee may apply. Article copy provided to the newsletter editor courtesy of Andrew Greenlee.*

Back to top

Back to top

Law Update

As of March 3 2015
By Brian W. Ohm, JD
VP of Chapter Affairs Dept. of Urban & Regional Planning, UW-Madison

For questions or comments about these cases, please contact: bwohm@wisc.edu.

No Wisconsin Supreme Court opinions to report.

Wisconsin Court of Appeals Opinions
Regulation of Short-term Rentals

In *Heef Realty and Investments, LLP v. City of Cedarburg Board of Appeals*, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals addressed the question of whether short-term rental is a permitted use for property in a single-family residential district under the City of Cedarburg's zoning ordinance.   The owners of two homes initiated the lawsuit after the City's Board of Appeals decided that the City's zoning ordinance did not permit the short-term rental of homes in a single-family district. The circuit court disagreed with the Board's interpretation of the City's zoning ordinance and reversed the decision of the Board. The Court of Appeals affirmed the order of the circuit court.

In their argument before the Court, the homeowners pointed out that the City's zoning ordinance allowed long-term rentals and that there was no definition of the minimum time period allowed. The city's building inspector also testified that second homes and vacation homes are permitted uses within residential zones. The City's zoning ordinance listed "single-family dwellings" as a permitted use in the single-family residential district. The ordinance defined "dwelling" as "[a]ny building or portion thereof designed or used exclusively as a residence and having cooking facilities, but not including boarding or lodging houses, motels, hotels, tents, cabins, or mobile homes."

The Court of Appeals noted that the language of the City's ordinance is about the use of property, not the duration of that use. The court stated this case was about whether a zoning board can arbitrarily impose time/occupancy restrictions in a residential zone where there are none adopted by the City. Here the Court found the Board lacked that authority given that the concept of "residential" did not distinguish between short-term and long-term occupancy. According to the Court, "[i]f the City is going to draw a line requiring a certain time period of occupancy in order for property to be considered a dwelling or residence, then it needs to do so by enacting clear and ambiguous law."

The case is recommended for publication in the official reports.

Back to top

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