



Mobilizing APA State Chapter Sustainability & the New Sustainable Community Division

Making the connection between advancing sustainability planning, APA State Chapters, and the new APA Sustainable Community Division was the topic of one of the Division's by-right sessions at the National APA Conference in Chicago (April 2013), the [***Mobilizing Sustainability Facilitated Discussion***](#) (Sunday, 3pm).

Mobilizing an effective response to the sustainability threat, with climate change being the front-line assault, is the ultimate planning challenge. Our effectiveness now will make the decisive difference. We are winning a few battles but losing the war, and the window of opportunity is closing. The widening gap between the expanding sustainability challenge and accelerating socio-economic-environmental trends underscores the urgency of an effective response. Our current trajectory is one of catastrophic climate change from society's lagging and insufficient response. The complexity of the challenge, from understanding to transformation, further confounds initiative, motivation, and sufficient progress. Under these conditions, business-as-usual is no longer an option and best practices are necessary but insufficient. Intentional, focused, and on-going outside-the-box experimentation and innovation, scaling, and implementation are essential.

Fortunately, planning is well positioned to rise to the challenge and lead successfully. Although its core competence, or "silo" expertise is often understood to be land use, its core method is integrative, innovative design and planning. This core methodological expertise has been applied to the wide variety of issues within planning's domain. It now needs to be focused on the complex systems challenge of sustainability. This application has already begun in the emerging arena of [***regenerative design and planning \(Living Building Challenge\)***](#) arising from the longer tradition of [***ecological planning***](#). It focuses on the endgame of eliminating the sources of systematic environmental impacts and on creating net positive impacts. It uses this focus as a way to gauge and motivate the level of creativity and on-going innovation needed for ultimate success.

Coincidentally and fortunately, this method simultaneously transforms the economy, which is the essential component of sustainability success (see RMI's [***Reinventing Fire campaign***](#) for an innovative cross-sector initiative that uses sustainability as an innovation platform to invent the new perpetually prosperous ecological economy). In this way, the traditional win-lose relationship between the environment and the economy is transformed into a win-win relationship. With this approach, sustainability becomes a prosperity platform and method. It is the current economy's systematic violation of sustainability principles that is undermining the integrity of the regenerative global life support system and primary economy that we call nature and its capacity to continue in any ecologically rich, diverse, and productive state. With a compromised biosphere, society will find it difficult to impossible to continue.

As the new Division and State Chapters wrestle with how to expand and amplify society's



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sustainability response and rise to the leadership challenge, planning's core competence and evolving practice of [***regenerative design and \(Busby-A Pioneers Perspective\)***](#) can be tapped as a model and one essential source of innovation towards success.

In beginning to address this situation within their sphere's of influence, the APA CA Northern and APA CO Sustainability Committees conducted an informal research project beginning in the fall of 2012. The inquiry briefly examined the current practice and challenge of sustainability planning by State APA Chapters. The resulting article summarizes the findings and develops the issues and implications for moving forward. It formed part of the foundation for the facilitated discussion and a LinkedIn discussion. The research led to the facilitated discussion working group consisting of sustainability committee directors from APA MA and APA FL State Chapters. Links to these materials are listed below. The facilitated discussion session included breakout discussions that addressed the following questions.

1. What would it take to mobilize sustainability planning in your state APA chapter?
2. What are the ways for state APA chapters to collaborate on sustainability planning for mutual benefit?
3. What are the best ways that the new Division can promote innovative sustainable planning and support state chapter planning efforts?
4. Your action commitments?

Session presenters will summarize the breakout discussions and post them subsequently. The presenters will also constitute the core of an informal work group of the new division on this topic and subsequent initiatives will be announced through the new Division's blog and web site. Review the materials, contribute to the LinkedIn dialogue, and join the response.

Links:

- **APA Conference Session Description (Mobilizing Sustainability Facilitated Discussion):**
https://www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=ACTIVITY_13CONF_S856
- **Article -**
 - **On Division's Blog:** <http://apascd.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/challenge-of-sustainability-planning/>
 - **PDF** (Division's First Newsletter, p. 4): <http://planning.org/divisions/sustainable/newsletter/2013/pdf/spr.pdf>



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- **LinkedIn**

Discussion: http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&gid=2754890&type=member&item=227023008&qid=7b84a2b6-120e-49cb-95d0-feed93ce4ba3&trk=group_most_recent_rich-0-b-ttl&goback=.gmr_2754890

- **APA Facilitated Discussion Presentation (PDF):**

https://norcalapa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/APA_FacilDiscSesste.pdf

- **Summary of Session's Breakout Discussions (PDF)**