

# Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

## Response to the Northern News articles regarding the AICP designation

Submitted by Luke Connolly, AICP

NOVEMBER 2000

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Planners, especially those who cherish their AICP designations, may be incensed by what Richard Carson said in his article "The Road Not Taken" in the Summer 2000 Northern News; unfortunately, however, much of what he said regarding the AICP designation, and planners in general, is true.

While I don't agree with several of Carson's comments, such as AICP status actually being a limitation of one's ability to manage others, I do agree with his more inflammatory observation that "the AICP designation is such a joke." The primary reason I agree with Carson on this point, however, is not one mentioned by him. But rather, that increasingly, planners bearing AICP on their business cards are the most ineffectual and inexperienced at their jobs, at least those working for local government agencies. In every city I have worked for (all in the South Bay Area), all of the department directors and nearly all the top management personnel had passed the AICP exam. Most of these people also had many years of experience as planners as well as the desire and political savvy to rise within the local government hierarchy—those were the characteristics that enabled them to attain their positions, not the AICP designation, which usually appeared only after they had proven themselves as planners.

Unlike Carson, I took the AICP exam in 1997, ignoring the refrain of co-workers, "If (s)he could pass, why do you want to take it?" Once certified, I became more conscious of the other members "in the club." Now, three years later, I'm a member of the chorus. I've even come up with the theory that the more prominently one displays their AICP certificate, the less they know about planning.

Joking aside, all the AICP designation indicates is, as Carson said, that you passed a multiple-choice test, and an easy one at that. It is not tantamount to a lawyer passing the bar or even an accountant passing the CPA exam.

Also, given the growing number of entry-level planners who are AICP designated, it seems doubtful anyone is checking on whether applicants even meet the minimum criteria "required" to take the exam. In the accompanying Northern News' rebuttal to Carson's article, it's apparent that the APA gloats over the increasing proportion of APA members who are AICP designated. I would also applaud this trend if there was a corresponding rise in the proficiency of planners or if I thought that the profession was making inroads at improving the quality of the built environment. This, however, is not happening, but I'm afraid the significance of the AICP designation has become lost through its proliferation.

Another of Carson's observations about planners, AICP or not, that "We act like religious missionaries in a foreign country. We go around telling people that our truth will set them free, but we are clueless about political reality" goes even more to the point about what is wrong with the majority of planners and why planning itself so often ends up marginalized within the decision-making processes of most communities. Unlike related disciplines, law or economics for instance, planning does not do a good job of embracing opposing viewpoints (note that Carson's article was published in the *Northern News* simultaneously with a rebuttal) or reaching out beyond its own membership to "spread the word." By sitting around coffee

### Editors Note

This issue of the Northern News continues the discussion of the AICP designation, mostly in response to the Richard Carson article "The Road Not Taken." A few readers were excited by the nature of both viewpoints and therefore decided to offer their viewpoint on this topic. The first article by Luke Connolly offers some insight into the AICP designation from his experience in planning in the Silicon Valley. The second article, by Ken Norwood takes on a more historical perspective of the AICP designation.



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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

by Mark Rhoades

This may be my last column as Director, or maybe second to last. Next month's Northern News will have election ballots for two NSCCAPA Board positions, Director, and Administration Director. Yes, its been two years already, and I will not be seeking another term (although I will continue to be closely involved). The Board is seeking nominations for the positions, but the position of Director requires two years of experience on the board. The board also has current openings for appointed positions, including Legislative Liaison and Membership Director.

The NSCCAPA Board is also working on a number of upcoming events that include our annual Board Retreat (November 4, in SF, open to all APA members) and our annual Holiday Party that will be held at the Thirsty Bear Restaurant on Thursday, December 7, from 6-9pm. And finally, the Board, under the guidance of our Professional Development Officer, Rebecca Lave, is working on a Spring Lecture Series that will include a number of timely topics and well known experts.

## Professional Notes

Publisher/planning consultant Warren W. Jones and planning consultant/writer/editor Natalie Macris are co-authors of A Career Worth Planning recently published by APA. The book is available through the APA Planners Book Service catalog and the APA website ([www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org))."

Charlie Stump has been promoted to the director of Planning and Community Development with the City of Ukiah. Besides managing all land use and environmental planning activities for the City, he will act as Building Official and manage the Building Division staff. He will also assist the City Manager with all economic development and redevelopment activities.

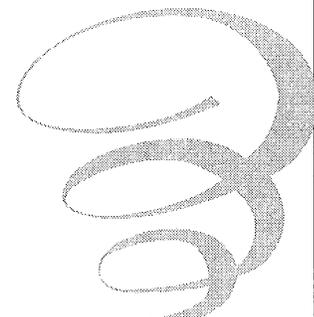
Jennifer Andersen, AICP, has joined the City of Fremont as a Redevelopment Project Manager. Jennifer previously served as a Redevelopment Specialist with the City of San Leandro and the County of San Diego. She can be reached at [jandersen@ci.fremont.ca.us](mailto:jandersen@ci.fremont.ca.us) (510-494-4648).

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The deadline for submitting materials for inclusion in the Northern News is the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the month prior to publication.



## NSCCAPA Holiday Party

Get ready!

This year's **Holiday Party** will be held at the Thirsty Bear Restaurant in downtown San Francisco on December 7th from 6pm to 9pm. The Thirsty Bear is located at 661 Howard Street (between 2nd and 3rd), conveniently located near the Montgomery Street BART Station.

## APA Co-sponsors GIS Day 2000, November 15

The goal of GIS Day 2000 is to make 3 million adults and children around the world aware of the many ways various professions—including planners—are using geographic information systems to improve everyday life. Among the event's principal sponsors are the National Geographic Society, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Library of Congress, and ESRI. Joining APA as Associate Sponsors are the Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund, URISA, and other organizations.

Last year, planners in public agencies, private practice, and academia were among the 2,000 sponsors of local events, which ranged from open houses and map galleries to public forums and in-school presentations. While government and university GIS labs, engineering firms, utility companies, and many other businesses also participate, GIS Day provides an excellent opportunity to educate the public on the role that planners play at national, state, regional, and local levels. Planners can also link World Town Planning Day (November 8) to National Geography Awareness Week (November 12-18) and GIS Day, thereby benefiting from the media attention drawn to those events.

For tips on how to plan, promote, and hold a local event, visit [www.gisday.com](http://www.gisday.com). The site contains examples of last year's activities organized by state and city, a list of those who have already registered their intention to host an event this November (also searchable by state), and a forum for posting queries, seeking ideas, and finding partners. The site also includes a helpful guide for generating local media, a sample press release, and a template for creating a GIS Day page on your own web site.

Additional ideas related to GIS Day and National Geography Awareness Week can be found on APA's web site. Visit [www.planning.org/educ/](http://www.planning.org/educ/) and scroll down to information on K-12 education and youth outreach. Visit [www.planning.org/abtaicp/world.htm](http://www.planning.org/abtaicp/world.htm) for more information on World Planning Day.

## 15th Annual Land Use Law and Planning Conference

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UCLA Extension's annual Land Use Law and Planning Conference is a leading source of information for attorneys, planners, public officials, consultants, developers, real estate professionals, and others involved in planning and development issues in California. This year's conference presents an update of important new legislation, case law, policies, and trends in the field of land use law and planning—presented by several speaker experts.

Topics will include updates and assessments on: planning, redevelopment, and zoning law; takings law; housing elements and affordable housing mandates; land use decision-making ethics; CEQA; urban runoff regulations; water supply/land use issues; and dealing with LULUs (locally undesirable land uses).

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## Responses ... *(continued from page 1)*

houses (independently run, of course) unanimously praising the virtues of new urbanism and electric shuttles, and unanimously sneering at the sterility of suburbia and the evils of the automobile, what have planners accomplished? If the goal was to end up branded by others as a group of harmless idealists, then we have succeeded. If, however, the goal was to help bring the type of development we're supposed to feel so passionately about to fruition, then we have failed—at least thus far.

*Luke Connolly is a planner with the City of Palo Alto*

## Letter to the editor

*Ken Norwood, AICP*

Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the two articles in the last issue about AICP and its role in the planning profession. The exchange between Norman Krumholz, AICP President, and Richard Carson, Director of the Clark County Department of Community Development prompts historical recall to me as a senior in the planning profession who witnessed the transition of the AIP to APA, and the birth of AICP.

As a member of AIP in the late 1950's in the California Chapter Southern Section, I remember several other earlier planning professionals—Kenneth Topping, Glenn Blossom, and Larry Wilson, and others, who met as a committee concerning pending State legislation, in California, New Jersey, and several other states which would require State examination and licensing of public and private practice planners. As I recall, the civil engineers were pushing for the regulation of “planners.” Remember, in the 1950's and early 1960's most members

of the AIP, and later the APA, were public planners in local government. But as the post WWII housing boom generated hordes of home seekers, and land owners—(farmers wanting to bail-out and cash-in), builders, and developers were hiring anyone who could draw a subdivision map. These folks were called land planners and some were licensed civil engineers, attorneys, and architects but many “consultants” got their start in the immediate postwar land rush drawing subdivision maps, lot splits, and learning how to process zone change applications. In the early 1950's there were few Masters' Degree Programs around the country and a small number of trained planners.

As the volume of subdivisions grew, public agency planners were greatly concerned about the quality of the plans brought before them by anyone who had the titles “City Planner,” “Planner,” or “Planning Consultant.” Some specialized in ways to maximize lot yield, and minimize street and utility costs. A great deal of new standards were quickly being invented and public planning officials were witnessing a chaotic time as we embryonic but dedicated AIP/APA planners attempted to gain credibility and champion for the ideals of comprehensiveness, integrity, and recognition in the “planning profession.”

So there we were, planners in the Southern Section APA and Cal Chapter, (as well as in other State Chapters), facing the prospect of laws for licensing of engineers as planners, with a myriad of standards and constraints that did not represent the public responsibility, planning principles, and ethical standards that the AIP and APA were founded on. The solution proffered by APA National and State Chapters was for an internal professional certification within the APA and thereby intercepting a state controlled and administered testing and regulatory process. The vision put forth at the birth of AICP was for an ongoing program of continued planning education and review of ethical practice.

*(continued on page 6)*



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## Response ...

The APA and AICP have progressed along that path, and have raised the bar by which planners are observed and evaluated by the society. However, the excellence that I personally desire to see the Planning Profession rise to relates to comprehensive planning which integrates social, economic, and environmental justice with the precepts for ecological design, sustainability, and smart growth - all interpretations of the highest ideals for excellence in planning. The authors of the AICP focused articles in the September 2000 Northern News issue both embrace the above precepts and miss the point concerning why APA and AICP are not fully up to the challenges and pitfalls at this time of diversification within the profession, a run away economy, a breakdown of community, and accelerated social alienation and physical isolation. What we have is a fragmented AICP with too many members whose main responsibility is to the needs of private interests, financial institutions, auto/highway interests, development corporations, and single family tract home builders - the raw forces of urban sprawl. Visually appealing facades do not make for responsible comprehensive planning.

(continued from page 4)

Unfortunately, too many stop at what the architects and engineers may call good design of a single site.

I came into my first planning job in 1945 aware that those special interests were contrary to the best planning practices. My view has changed only a bit, except to acknowledge that the AICP testing and certification offers a higher degree of member self discipline. We have a much better profession than without the AICP designation. Both of the previous writers open up a dialogue that APA and AICP must encourage and expand upon within the organizations. A new level of demonstrative leadership will be required to raise the acceptance for socially, economically, and environmentally responsible planning, not just for planners but for the entire society of citizens, businesses, and government. We must come out of our shells of self-satisfaction.

*Ken Norwood, AICP-Architect, and Planner is the Executive Director for the Shared Living Resource Center, Inc located in Berkeley, California.*



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# NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

## November

- 8 World Town Planning Day
- 12-18 National Geography Awareness Week
- 16 Association of Bay Area Governments Executive Board Meeting  
Board will discuss proposed revisions and adopt final Regional Housing Needs allocations for Bay Area cities and counties.
- 18 BAAMA GIS poster contest Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter (Near Lake Merritt BART) 2 - 6 p.m. Public Viewing/Ice Cream Social/Awards  
Details: <http://www.baama.org/postercontest>

## December

- 7 NSCCAPA Holiday Party at the Thirsty Bear Restaurant in downtown San Francisco 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

### NOVEMBER

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### DECEMBER

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**Northern News**  
 EDITORIAL OFFICE  
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 1921 Emerald Street  
 Concord, CA 94518

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