



Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2002/03

Hing Wong and Billy Gross Win Landslide Election

See Director's Note on page 2

Three Rules for Better Writing

By Natalie Macris

A well-written plan or other planning document can be a valuable resource for citizens, decision-makers, government agencies, consultants, and many others. It can keep a planning process running smoothly, advance policies, prevent misunderstandings, head off legal challenge, and even improve the public's perception of government.

Then why are so many planning documents hard to read, understand, and use? There are many reasons. Some planning documents are difficult to write clearly because they need to "please everyone," from citizens who want to know what will happen in their neighborhood to lawyers who may need to defend the planning organization against a lawsuit. Political pressures can make planners "soft-pedal" controversial points, rather than write in clear, direct statements. Esoteric legal requirements have made some planning documents longer and introduced complicated terminology. Meanwhile, schedule and budget constraints mean that most planners do not have much time or money to spend on editing and rewriting, let alone adding maps or other graphics that would make their documents more interesting to read.

With those limitations in mind, here are three basic rules for avoiding some of the writing idiosyncrasies of the planning field. These rules are common suggestions found in almost any guidebook on writing—you have no doubt heard them before. Consider, though, how they apply specifically to the writing quirks of the planning profession.

Rule 1: Write Simple Sentences

Generally speaking, each sentence you write should: (1) be short (no more than 20 to 25 words long), and (2) express only one main idea.

Short sentences that deliver one idea at a time are usually easier to understand. They also force you, the writer, to think more carefully about the message of each sentence. Using short sentences can be especially effective when you are explaining a process or sequence of events (something that planners do routinely). Example:

Long Sentence: The City Council adopted the ordinance in October, following which Planning Department staff identified a change that they believed to be necessary to one of the conditions, requiring the Council to review and adopt a revised ordinance in November.

Shorter Sentences: The City Council adopted the ordinance in October. Planning Department staff later identified a necessary change to one of the conditions. This required the Council to review and adopt a revised ordinance in November.



In the above example, the three shorter sentences follow the "one-idea-per-sentence" rule.

Rule 2: Write Active Sentences

Consider this sentence: "It is the determination of City staff that there is a possibility of associated increases in traffic noise if this project is approved and constructed." It sounds bureaucratic and dull, doesn't it? It's also unclear. Who is going to approve the project? Who is going to construct it?

The sentence is "passive"; it uses the passive voice (in this case, the verb "is") and has several nouns ("determination," "possibility," "increases") that the writer could convert to verbs.

Planning documents are usually full of sentences that needlessly use the passive voice. Here are some common examples.

(continued on page 4)

(Note: This article is adapted from *Planning in Plain English: Writing Tips for Urban and Environmental Planners*, by Natalie Macris, published by APA. The book is available from the APA Planners Book Service at www.planning.org. Copyright by APA.)

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Congratulations to **Hing Wong** on his election to Director and to **Billy Gross** for his re-election as Administrative Director! We received many more ballots than usual from places ranging from Petaluma to Santa Cruz. Thank you, Northern Section Members, for voting and showing your enthusiastic support for these two candidates.

It is sad for me, but true—this is my last column as your Director. It has been a great experience and I thank you all for your support. When I was elected, I had several goals. I am happy to say that I achieved them and more. These achievements would not have been possible without the best Board of Directors that I have ever worked with. It has been a pleasure to serve with so many Board members including, **Juan Borelli, Jerry Haag, Anthony Drummond, Mark Rhoades, Regina Adams, Jennifer Andersen, Billy Gross, Tim Woloshyn, Pierce Macdonald, Rebecca Lave, Matt Raimi, Hing Wong, Michael Bethke, Wayne Goldberg, Zack Dahl, Larry Tong, Andrea Ouse, Pat Collins, Don Bradley and George Williamson**—to name a few!

During these last two years we have launched our first website, developed an International Subsection, co-sponsored the first APA Student Conference, had a more active legislative presence in the Bay Area, and held regular after-work events. While these items are the most visible to the members, the backbone work of the Northern Section by the Treasurer, Communications Director, Advertising Director, Administrative Director and Newsletter Editor are what kept us going from month to month. The wonderful support I have received from all the Board Members has made this experience fun and satisfying. A special thanks to Juan Borelli, Director Pro Tem, who has never said no to any responsibility and always pitched in to help.

As one of my last activities as your Director I attended a dinner that we hosted for a delegation of Chinese Planners. Our very own **International Section** did a marvelous job of organizing their itinerary in the Bay Area. See Jennifer Andersen's column on that wonderful experience.

I hope I will see a big turn out at our annual **Holiday Party, the Island Carnival**. This year's venue is something different for us—the Oakland Museum. Be sure to come and bring your checkbook for raffle tickets to benefit the California Planning Foundation—and wear your best island gear! We can all dream of being planners on an exotic island. . .

— Jeri Ram, AICP

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The deadline for submitting materials for inclusion in the **Northern News** is the 15th day of the month prior to publication.





Deputy Director of the Shanghai Deep-Water Port Authority, Mr. Bao; General Manager of Shanghai New Port City Development Company, Mr. Cao; and Northern Section Director, Ms. Ram.

NCCAPA hosts the Nanhui Delegation from China

Delegates from Nanhui, a new city just south of Shanghai that was farming country 3 years ago, stopped by for a 1-1/2 day whirlwind tour of San Francisco and the Port District of Oakland. The delegates—consisting of the City's new mayor and those responsible for managing, financing, planning, and developing infrastructure for the City—will be turning Nanhui into a major hub for transportation and cargo business in China. The key feature in this plan is the development of a huge deep-water port across the bay from Nanhui. To better understand the challenges port cities face, they are touring San Francisco, Chicago, New York, New Orleans and Honolulu.

Unfortunately, one of those days scheduled for the tour was November 11th, Veterans Day! However, the International Section rose to the challenge and formed a team consisting of **Juan Borrelli**, APA Director Pro Tem and RBF Planning and Urban Design Director; **Pipi Ray Diamond**, Research Analyst with Lapkoff and Gobalet Demographic Research; **Michael Corbett**, Asian Market Director of Treston and Redmond, LLC; and myself.

We were able to take the delegation on a tour of Catellus Corporation's new Mission Bay development (many thanks to the Senior V.P. of Development **Eric Harrison** for leading that informative tour), the new Pac Bell Ball Park and remodeled Ferry Building (kudos to **Cynthia Servetnick** of the Port of San Francisco for arranging this), and a brief driving tour of the City before whisking them off to a wonderful dinner at Maxfield's at the Palace Hotel. Tuesday morning was spent with **Rick Wiederhorn**, **Steve Gregory** and **Jim Putz** of the Port of Oakland. Whew!

Due to communication difficulties with the delegates, who were invited to the United States by Jeff Soule of APA National, the tour was planned on short notice. Many thanks to everyone who helped pull it together. Juan, Pipi and Michael deserve our special thanks. Even with the hectic schedule, a good time (and great food) were had by all!

Cuba. A few seats are still available on our Cuba excursion, presently planned to leave LAX on February 21, 2003. For more information e-mail me at: jandersen@ci.fremont.ca.us or call 510-494-4648.

— Jennifer Andersen, AICP

AICP Exam Deadlines

Monday, December 9, 2002 (firm): Initial AICP application submission deadline. Fee Required: \$60

Monday, March 3, 2003 (firm): Test site registration submission deadline. This is for applicants who have received approval notice to take the AICP exam. Fee Required: \$325

Saturday, May 10, 2003: Test Date

Go Online! Apply and/or test site register for the AICP exam online:

www.planning.org

More AICP Exam News on page 5

BULLETIN BOARD

Monterey Bay RAC Gears Up

In September, the Monterey Bay RAC, headed up by Hamilton Swift's Michael Bethke, held a "kick-off" Fall Dinner Meeting in Watsonville, co-sponsored by AEP.

The meeting focused on "Housing Issues in the Monterey Bay Region" and featured **Kate McKenna**, **Ken Thomas**, and **Lisa Dobbins** as speakers. Approximately 40 APA/AEP members participated in a timely discussion of ballot initiatives and AMBAG housing units allocation. Both the Santa Cruz Sentinel and Good Times, a weekly newspaper serving Santa Cruz Co., covered the event, ensuring that APA has a presence on important housing issues.

The Monterey Bay RAC plans to hold monthly brown-bag lunches, as well as another dinner meeting in 4-6 months. If you are interested in organizing an event or would like more information, please contact Michael Bethke at (831) 459-9992.

Writing ... *(continued from page 1)*

The Ambiguous Sentence

By using the passive voice, the writer avoids identifying the subject of the sentence (that is, who or what is responsible for the action implied in the sentence). This use of the passive voice is the worst offender because the writing is not only dull, but often unclear. Example:

Passive Sentence: A preliminary grading plan shall be submitted prior to project approval.

Active Sentence: The developer must submit a grading plan before the City approves the project.

Notice that the active sentence identifies who should submit the grading plan, as well as who will approve the project. Clearing up this type of ambiguity allows the reader—the planner enforcing the project's conditions of approval, for example—to understand who is responsible for what.

The Lazy Sentence

Sometimes, a writer just gets lazy. Phrases that begin with the words “in” or “by” are often clues that the writer could easily turn the sentence around to read in the active voice. Example:

Passive Sentence: Existing contaminant levels at the project site are summarized in Table 5.

Active Sentence: Table 5 lists existing contaminant levels at the project site.

Using Verbs as Nouns

Nouns created from verbs are common culprits in passive sentences. You can convert many of these nouns back into verbs to create shorter, clearer, and more active sentences. Using the example cited above:

Passive Sentence: It is the determination of City staff that there is a possibility of associated increases in traffic noise if this project is approved and constructed.

Active Sentence: City staff has determined that traffic noise may increase if the County approves this project and the developer builds it as proposed.

Rule 3: Use Simple Words and Avoid Jargon

The best way to recognize planning jargon in your writing is to imagine that you are speaking directly to one of your readers, or better yet to a friend—

someone who is reasonably intelligent but who may not know a lot about your subject. The words that seem too complicated, pompous, or formal for that situation are probably the jargon words. Examples:

Jargon Sentence: Public infrastructure can be growth-inducing from a local and regional perspective.

Plain English Sentences: Construction of streets, sidewalks, and water and sewer pipes would allow development plans for the area to move ahead. Development in this area could bring changes throughout the region.

Again, the example shows how just a few jargon words can cloud the meaning of an entire sentence. Notice how removing the jargon forces the writer to convey the idea more clearly.

Some words that clutter planning documents do not qualify as planning jargon. These words are not specific to our profession, but they are still unnecessarily complicated. It's generally best to replace these words with shorter, more common ones. Examples:

Complicated Words: The property is located contiguous to the airport and comprises 30 acres.

Simpler Words: The 30-acre property is located next to the airport.

It is important to remember that almost no one follows all of the rules all of the time. Sometimes there are good reasons for this. For example, in writing about planning matters, the passive voice can be the right choice when it isn't practical or appropriate to list every party that will be carrying out an action. The actors may be unknown, unimportant, obvious, or best left unidentified for political reasons. Sometimes, too, jargon can be useful as shorthand—for example, in a memo to colleagues—as long as you can be certain that all of your readers will understand it.

Another important point: some offices have already set up report formats and standard language requirements that violate “the rules” and make clear communication more difficult. In these instances, it's best to recognize that change, like the planning process itself, usually happens one small step at a time. The same applies to the process of becoming a better writer.

Natalie Macris is a San Francisco-based urban and environmental planner who specializes in writing and editing planning documents. You can reach her at nmacris@planningediting.com

City of Pleasanton

Assistant Planner, Limited Term
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The City of Pleasanton is searching for a motivated individual to join our planning team. This position is responsible for preparing reports on routine, less complex planning issues to include variances, minor modifications, conditional uses, etc. The position prepares studies on routine, less complex development proposals. Researching, collecting, interpreting and organizing a variety of planning data, including land use, demographic, economic, and housing. A four-year degree is required in planning or a related field. Experience in city planning and zoning and knowledge of contemporary city planning and zoning principles/practices as well as knowledge of state/municipal law are also required. The position is approved until June 30, 2003 and will be approved in one-year increments at the city's discretion. To Apply: Obtain a City application and full brochure at the City of Pleasanton, Human Resources Department, 123 Main Street, Pleasanton, call our Career Hotline (925)931-5056; or download an application from our City web site @++ HYPERLINK <http://www.ci.pleasanton.ca.us> www.ci.pleasanton.ca.us. Applications and resumes must be received by 5:00 P.M. January 3, 2003. Postmarks and faxes will not be accepted.

City of Salem, OR

Urban Development Administrator
The City of Salem, Oregon (population 135,000), located in the center of the Willamette Valley—one of the most fertile and agriculturally productive regions of the world—is searching for a dynamic leader with outstanding interpersonal skills to serve as Urban Development Administrator. Supervising a Department budget of \$95,778,460, the Administrator will report to the Director of Community Development. He/She will oversee Urban Renewal, Housing/Commercial Rehabilitation, Real Estate Services, and Urban Development Financial Services for the City. Candidates should have a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in Business Administration, Industrial Management, Finance, Marketing, or a related field and seven to ten years of experience in a related field or any combination of education, experience, and training which provided the required knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the essential functions of the class. The salary range for the Urban Development Administrator is between \$60,360 and \$76,596. If you are interested in this outstanding opportunity, please submit resume to Bob Murray, Bob Murray and Associates, 735 Sunrise Avenue, Suite 145, Roseville, CA 95661, (916) 784-9080, (916) 784-1985 fax, or email HYPERLINK "mailto: apply@bobmurrayassoc.com" apply@bobmurrayassoc.com by November 30, 2002. Brochure available.

INDEPENDENT CONTRACT PLANNERS—WHERE ARE YOU?

I've relocated from southern California and hear about more contract planning/short term consulting assignments in local government than I can handle. I'd like to be able to make referrals [at no cost], South Bay especially, so please contact me and introduce yourself. Jennifer Coile, AICP at HYPERLINK "mailto: planner@hollinet.com" planner@hollinet.com, tel. 831-637 9144.

It's AICP Exam Time

Applications are due December 9 for the annual American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Examination in May. The application is involved and takes some time so don't put it off.

Don Bradley has been assisting Northern Section APA planners prepare for the 150 question, multiple-choice test for the past 14 years. Classes meet one Saturday per month from January through April with guest lecturers in the areas of the exam domains, with small study groups meeting informally to discuss some of the readings. Dr. Bradley provides over 1000 questions, answers and rationale for the choices. Classes have enjoyed an 89% to 100% pass rate range with a 94% average for 17 groups at UCB, UCD, and Stanford. Cost will not be more than \$100 for the printing of the materials. Call Dr. Don Bradley at 650-940-0915.

New AICP CD-ROM Exam Prep

January 2003: AICP will offer the National Exam Preparation Course on CD-ROM for purchase, beginning January 2003, through the APA Planners Book Service: www.planning.org/bookstore. Price: \$195 and \$230 (non-members) \$10 shipping/handling extra. For more information contact Planners Book Service: (312) 786-6344 or Carolyn Torma: (312) 431-9100

AICP Reduced Exam Fee Scholarships

AICP has mailed its annual call for reduced exam fee scholarship (selected candidates pay \$55 instead of the usual \$325 exam fee) nominations to chapter PDOs. Each year, AICP sets aside a number of scholarships for each chapter PDO to select recipients based on financial need and/or minority preference. The selections are made and forwarded to AICP national under the strictest of confidence. AICP strongly encourages chapter PDOs to respond to staff's scholarship request. AICP wants to make sure that deserving planners take advantage of this very important program. For more information, please contact your local chapter PDO or Michael DeVone Jones (202) 872-0611 ext. 1024 (mjones@planning.org).

PDO Audit Requests: AICP Exam

Chapter PDOs have also received the usual yearly notice from AICP national to submit their requests to audit the May exam. Many PDO's find this AICP program quite useful and auditing the AICP exam allows PDOs to remain relevant in their instruction. Please note that AICP requires non-applications certification wishing to audit the exam must sign a non-disclosure agreement. For more information, please contact: Michael DeVone Jones (202) 872-0611 ext. 1024 (mjones@planning.org).

Cuba: Fitting The Pieces Together *By Lora Lucero, AICP*

A trip to Cuba is like putting together a puzzle—trying to make sense of the pieces you learned as a child (the Cuban missile crisis and trade embargo), from current events (Elian Gonzales and Jimmy Carter), and finally what you see when you arrive. This summer, I spent two weeks cycling through Havana and parts of the countryside. Although I certainly have a clearer picture of the puzzle now than I did before the trip, I think Cuba is extraordinarily complex.

Our visit was arranged by Global Exchange in San Francisco, working in concert with Club de Cicloturismo Gran Caribe. Given the large size of our group (27 Americans and 8 Cubans), we made quite a spectacle almost everywhere we rode, with our little Cuban flags waving on our handlebars. We started and ended the visit in Havana, the largest city on the island. In 1982, La Habana Vieja (the old colonial Havana) was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is now the focus of serious restoration efforts. I met a city planner who invited me to her office to talk about La Habana Vieja. Upon my arrival though, I was told by her superior that Americans are not permitted in their office without official permission, quite to the planner's embarrassment. Although our Cuban guides bent over backwards to show us how open their culture and government are, this new restriction at the planner's office was an obvious contradiction.

Our itinerary included Vinales in the westernmost province of Pinar del Rio, where the limestone hills (or mogotes) and countryside look like southern China. There we climbed into the cave where Che Guevara commanded the Western Army during the Cuban Missile Crisis forty years ago. One of the advantages of traveling by bicycle is the ability to go where no bus, automobile or van can travel. Although it was quite a challenge for this city girl, sharing the dirt track with the oxen, horses and many other bicyclists. Our adventures into the remote areas of the countryside provided some of the most enriching experiences. Some ex-

amples — visiting a young female doctor checking her patient in a tiny clinic with no electricity, no refrigerator, and very few supplies, with rice drying on a mat outside her office door. Or jumping into a hidden waterfall that is so breathtaking you hope the road-builders never find their way to this special spot.

Along the way, we stopped at Las Terrazas near Soroa, Cuba's first UNESCO-sanctioned biosphere reserve where the original reforestation project grew into a sustainable community of about 850 people and now includes an ecotourist resort. We went to the Bay of Pigs in Matanzas Province where hundreds of crabs skitter across the beach and a Cuban hawk's cohiba cigars out in the water because he's not allowed on the tourist beach. Our journey also included Cienfuegos, and Trinidad, and Santa Clara, the first major city liberated by Che Guevara in the Revolucion.

Every morning started the same way, with Yeyo (our Cuban leader) tracing our route for the day on the ground with a small machete. And every evening, regardless of where we might be, ended with music and dancing. Any prospective traveler to Cuba should see Buena Vista Social Club. The Cuban music left an indelible impression on us all. A new book, "Cuba Confidential" by Ann Louise Bardach (2002) is a must-read also.

My Cuban puzzle is not complete, but only made more enticing by the pieces I found on my trip. I returned home with a strong belief that our country's 40-year blockade is an obsolete artifact that should go in the dustbin. And visitors to Cuba should tread lightly because tourism is a double-edged sword. We can learn a lot from each other, but I hope that country can resist our McDonalds and Burger Kings.

Lora A. Lucero, AICP, was formerly the Editor of APA's Land Use Law & Zoning Digest and staff attorney at APA. She currently resides in Albuquerque and is interested in another trip to Cuba when the opportunity arises. Contact Lora at LLucero@planning.org

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NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

December

- 4–6** Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Training, Las Vegas
- 9** AICP Exam Application Deadline. Visit www.planning.org
- 12** **NSCCAPA Holiday Party!**
- 16** International Section Potluck Party. RSVP jandersen@ci.fremont.ca.us

DECEMBER						
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

January 2003

- 11** APA Board of Directors Annual Retreat, Gaia Building, Berkeley.
Contact Hing Wong at (510) 464-7966
- 30** through February 1 — New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, New Orleans
- 31** through February 3 — IDA Institute

JANUARY						
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APA Holiday Party

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CPF Holiday Party Raffle Sponsorships

The APA Northern Section Board invites your company to sponsor a raffle prize to benefit the California Planning Foundation. The prizes will be raffled at the 2002 Holiday Party, December 12. The raffle is always a tremendous success and a lot of fun. Thank you to past sponsors: RBF Consulting, Environmental Science Associates, Jones & Stokes, Pacific Municipal Consultants, Jeffrey Eichenfield and Associates, Design Community & Environment, Dr. Don Bradley, Eco-City Builders, ASAP Quality Printing, and *Dwell Magazine!* Please contact piercemac@hotmail.com for more details.



Yes! I am making reservations for the NSCCAPA Holiday Party.

Name _____ Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Guest/s _____

Employer _____ Phone No. (_____) _____

Member Non-Member I'd like to purchase Raffle Tickets, _____ @ \$1.00 each/ _____ @ 7 for \$5.00