

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

American Planning Association Community Town Hall

August 24, 2021 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In some areas that have experienced rapid growth, facilities and infrastructure may be new and well financed, but social cohesion and transportation are lacking. Leapfrog development, large service areas, and being a terminal commuter community all contribute to the transportation challenges.

Small rural communities face challenges with developing and maintaining a vibrant downtown area where people can gather. Malls are in decline and good alternatives need to be developed. In some communities, people have high expectations for government services that are inconsistent with the political and economic culture.

Many communities, particularly smaller and rural communities, face challenges with transportation, affordable housing, economic development, and job opportunities.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Surprisingly, building permit activity remained steady throughout the pandemic. However, permits were generally issued for housing at the high middle and upper end of the affordability spectrum, not the affordable end.

One big impact of the pandemic was to focus communities on outdoor space. Spaces are being converted and improved to make them more suitable for outdoor use by creating shade, trails, and authorization for outdoor activities in public spaces, such as educational institutions. Some campus communities have been redefining their role in the community to create more public access and more outdoor public space. Some of these efforts will address the heat island effect in large cities.

Federal monies made available to mitigate the impact of the pandemic have helped some communities to make improvements to facilities and programs with significant community input and benefit.

The pandemic also created a massive exodus of people from the cities to rural areas which, in many cases, were not prepared to receive them. These people were largely white and well-to-do; many people of color were left behind in cities. People who are less well-off did not have access to broadband and could not work from home or from remote areas and were more likely to be adversely affected by the pandemic.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

The passage of SB 1350, which prohibits cities from regulating short term rentals, has reduced the number of units available for longer term lease in some communities, exacerbating the affordable housing shortage. This creates a host of associated problems for communities and residents.

Schools should be allowed to use education monies to pay for all students to receive free lunch.

Leaders should work collaboratively across their jurisdictional lines, particularly in areas such as Yavapai County where there are many small jurisdictions affected by common challenges.

Elected officials should base the information they report to the public on facts. They could provide sources and data to the public to support their decisions and explain the basis for their decisions.

The time has come to provide incentives for developers to include affordable housing in their developments.

The big issues, such as water quality, water supply, transportation, etc. need to be better coordinated among local jurisdictions. In addition, the statute that allows challenges to community plans should be modified as it interferes too much with the progress of community planning.

There should be concurrency of development and service. Planning responsibility should correlate to the level of responsibility for the service.

We should encourage planned communities, so that development occurs in proximity to the amenities that people need and want to make their communities livable, and address transportation challenges.