

Planners in Economic Development

by Kaizer Rangwala, AICP

Planners attempt to balance a wider range of long-term community goals, while economic development professionals focus primarily on economic development goals. Economic development professionals often perceive planners as consummate bureaucrats that put up roadblocks of development processes and regulations on the avenue to prosperity. Planners often complain about the lack of communication and the short-sighted, quick fix approach by the economic development professionals. Are the two professions at odds against each other or are they performing in harmony for the common good of the society?

This examination profiles planners who are involved in economic development activities, highlights the differences and similarities between the two professions, explores if these distinctive job functions can be embodied in one person or department without conflicts, and discusses a few prevailing trends common to the two fields. A series of interviews with six planners who are also economic development professionals was conducted to learn more about these issues.

Meet Our Panelists

■ Thomas Chamberlain

Mr. Chamberlain is an Economic Development Representative with Memphis Light, Gas & Water (MLG&W) Division. He earned a Master's in City and Regional Planning from University of Memphis and a Bachelor's in Public Affairs from Indiana University. He has over eight years of experience in Economic Development with MLG&W. In addition, he has also worked in various large and small community development roles and has several years of other experience working in public works and other related departments at the local community level.

■ Jeanette M. Honermann

Ms. Honermann has 25 years professional public administration experience. Jeanette began her career in the federal government and quickly learned that local government offered the best opportunity to "make a difference." What began as an unglamorous permit clerk position culminated as the Director of Planning and Development services in a progressive San Antonio suburb. By day, Jeanette is currently an economic development analyst for CPS Energy in San Antonio, Texas and on the weekends, she enjoys NASCAR and travel.

■ Kimberly Jones

Miss Jones is an assistant planner for the City of Lockport. Recent turnover has her serving as the City's economic development director where her main focus is business retention and expansion as well as attracting new businesses to the City's expanding boundaries.

■ Dr. Ned Murray, AICP

Dr. Murray, AICP has over 20 years of professional and academic experience in urban planning and economic development. He received his Doctorate in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has authored numerous articles and papers on urban planning and economic development. At Florida International Institute his current research focus is on urban economic development research in the Miami area.

■ Frank Turner, FAICP

Mr. Turner is Executive Director of the Development Business Center for the City of Plano, Texas. He coordinates the center's management team, which is responsible for conducting the city's planning, engineering, building and property standards programs. He has coordinated the city's revitalization of downtown Plano into a vibrant, transit-oriented village. Mr. Turner earned

Are planning and economic development at odds against each other, or are they performing in harmony for the common good of the society? Six planners who are also economic development professionals have their say...

a B.S. degree from Lambuth University and a M.A. degree from the University of Memphis. He joined the City of Plano in 1984 as Planning Director and was appointed Executive Director in 1998.

■ Steven Winter

Mr. Winter is a Senior Project Director in a regional planning agency that serves a large urban metropolis. His professional background includes teaching, curriculum development, and 25 years of experience in building, transforming, and operating non-profit organizations. In his current role, Mr. Winter is developing new cross-sector partnerships that address regional issues such as employment transportation, workforce development, suburb-to-suburb transportation, and economic development.

Forum Discussion

Are planning and economic development goals alike?

NED: The goals should be compatible because ideally both planning and economic development goals should emanate from a community plan that establishes a clear vision with complementary and achievable long- and short-term goals and objectives. However, I have typically seen economic development detached from planning within the organizational framework of local and state governments resulting in a fragmented delivery of services. Additionally, planners are often not in positions of authority in economic development organizations. Economic development will always be results-driven and strongly influenced by local politics and private development interests. Planners need to be players in these discussions and negotiations to ensure that short-term economic development strategies are compatible with the long-term vision of the community.

THOMAS: The planner's primary role is to establish the vision and the framework for the future. The Economic Development practitioner then needs to take that vision and apply it to ongoing projects within those pre-determined guidelines. The key is the open and continuous communication between the two profes-

sions, i.e., are they meeting periodically to see if the vision needs to be adjusted or if it is compatible with reality?

KIMBERLY: Planning is focused on the long-term, whereas economic developers can be myopic in their vision: trying to get rid of vacancies or empty land in order to create short term value, often with little regard whether the business fits in with the long-term plan of the City.

JEANNETTE: Both disciplines are often misunderstood and both are often necessarily interrelated to achieve the desired outcome.

STEVE: Outcomes from planning and economic development activities should create favorable conditions within which quality of life is enhanced. The end goals of the two fields are the same: to favorably affect the lives of those who live in our cities, towns, and regions.

FRANK: Planners have traditionally relied on zoning, subdivision regulations and capital improvements as the primary tools for implementing a comprehensive or general plan. Economic development programs, especially those targeted at redevelopment, are increasingly important tools used by planners. Planners in central cities and first ring suburbs are becoming entrepreneurs, creating catalysts for change. Planners must guard against being gatekeepers and arbitrarily defending plans instead of using them to aid decision-making. Economic development professionals must understand that their work must be directed to established community goals that extend beyond adding to the tax base. Bottom-line, planning and economic development are both important to building sustainable communities.

Do planners make good Economic Development professionals?

NED: Planners should be successful economic development professionals because they are uniquely trained
(continued next page)



“To be a successful economic development professional, one must vigorously show the high value-added that the planner brings to the job.”
— Dr. Ned Murray, AICP

and educated to understand how economic development must be coordinated and integrated with other planning functions including transit, affordable housing, capital improvement plans, environmental protection, and public infrastructure. These functions can be integrated in one department or agency, and, in fact, should be in order to avoid fragmentation.

As a former city planning and development director, my department was quite successful in implementing economic development goals and objectives. I believe much of this success was due to recognition by the city that economic development was an important function, and that in-house capacity was fundamental to the success of the city's economic development agenda. With this support in place the city and my department were able to develop good working partnerships with county and area economic development organizations. Roles were more clearly defined and resources more effectively utilized. I believe the planner, as an economic development professional, can provide important leadership and direction in the creation of working partnerships. However, planners must hone their negotiation skills and be willing and able to articulate the larger vision and goals of the community and how thoughtful economic development policies and strategies are keys to the successful implementation of the community's plan.

FRANK: Planners make excellent economic development professionals because of their broad education and analytical skill set. As with any specialization, new knowledge and skills must supplement those typically possessed by planners in order to be successful in economic development. A good understanding of the business side of development is essential to negotiation, but what business most desires is a professional who will champion their project through the approval process. This requires someone who is not only experienced and trusted, but is empowered to make projects happen.

KIMBERLY: As a planner, I have more knowledge of the parcel simply because most people come to the

planning department first. When I go into meetings with a prospect I can help explain the development process and talk about the property with a great amount of detail.

JEANNETTE: The basic form and function of planning and economic development can certainly cause a normal staffer to suddenly become bipolar! Still, it is possible to peacefully co-exist in most cases. Having the benefit of both sets of experience results in the planner's ability to fully understand and act upon economic development proposals with the long-term benefit in mind. Economic development choices must ultimately become more specific and more strategic and the planner is typically better trained in evaluating proposals in this manner. Additionally, because planners are often active in community level participation, the planners may have a higher credibility with the community as opposed to the economic development professional who is often not involved in the community processes necessary for land use.



“Economic development choices must ultimately become more specific and more strategic and the planner is typically better trained in evaluating proposals in this manner.”

— Jeanette M. Honermann

THOMAS: The planner who is ultimately successful in the economic development profession will need to adapt to a much quicker pace than in the typical government setting. Since the atmosphere is very action-oriented they will need the skills and ability to work under extreme deadlines, to multi-task and will

have very little time for detailed analysis or clear direction. Probably the biggest adjustment for most planners will be the importance of networking and communication on a regular basis. The economic development profession requires a lot of social activities and interaction which is something not found in the typical government or planning role. However, there are a lot of advantages to having a planning background. Probably the biggest asset the planner can bring is the knowledge of the overall development process. This really comes in to play on large complex projects both before and during the development process. The typical company disdains having to navigate the development process on their own and in many cases this expertise is lacking in most economic development departments.

STEVE: Planners whose primary focus is economic development can have deliverables that are time-sensitive and measurable. An experienced planner with multi-dimensional skills and abilities who is working in within a healthy organizational culture and understands the mission and operating principles of the private sector should be able to effectively address economic development issues.



“Planners come to their job with a strong sense of stewardship for their service area that is driven by an understanding that the creation of livable communities is within the possible, and therefore must be within the probable.”

— Steven Winter

What are the important Economic Development trends?

THOMAS: On the metropolitan level there are three major trends: speed, information and regionalism. The speed or time that you have to respond to projects continues to shrink. Just eight years ago we typically had a week or more to respond to project deadlines now that has been cut in half. The demand for information has skyrocketed in the last few years. Prospect surveys can now be in excess of 200 questions or 30 pages or more. This forces smaller communities to rely on other organizations because these responses require much more resources to be devoted to them. This will ultimately force regions to work more closely on a daily basis. We are also seeing more demand for both local information at the community level and the demand for maps and GIS-based information. A few years ago this was an advantage, now it has become a requirement. The trend towards regionalism is real because companies view areas as regions not as just cities or counties. To only represent a portion of the community really hurts the overall ability to attract a wide variety of projects as well as hinders the ability of a community to fully market itself outside the region to companies, site selectors, real estate brokers and investors.

NED: There are several important trends that have emerged or have continued to expand. First, there appears to be less of a focus on competition with surrounding states or even cities and more of a focus on building local capacity to compete within the larger global economy. This begins by developing a greater understanding of our local economies, a greater appreciation of the importance of industry retention and expansion and more clearly defined competitive advantage strategies, including cluster development. Secondly, and in keeping with the prior trend, cities and counties are beginning to focus more on sustainable economic development policies and strategies and the targeting of resources to indigenous businesses and industries. Understanding

the specific needs of locally grown industries in terms of emerging markets, technologies and worker skills are key to these policies and strategies. And lastly, the growing recognition that sustainable economies and communities can only be attained when quality of life issues are made integral to a community's economic development agenda. Quality of life within the eco-

“Probably the biggest asset the planner can bring [to the profession] is the knowledge of the overall development process.”

— Thomas Chamberlain



omic development context means a highly trained and educated workforce, good corporate citizens and a broad spectrum of housing choice and opportunity for local workers of all incomes.

STEVE: A clearly defined regional identity is required to remain competitive in a global economy. We can no longer think of sustainable competitive advantage being found in one city or town. Rather, competitive advantage is the synergy we get from collective assets.

(continued next page)

FRANK: Resource scarcity is a huge issue that we are just beginning to feel. Competition for energy, water, materials and skilled labor are just some of the factors reshaping cities and business...Electronic communication may well be underestimated in its impact on business patterns, especially in retailing and service delivery. Increasing energy cost will change the way people work, shop, learn and play...Changing demographics, including aging, formation of non-traditional households and ethnic diversity are changing markets and business practices.

JEANNETTE: I believe that the shifting demographics will have an important and significant influence on economic development. Declining birth rates, shrinking family size and longevity will re-direct resources to these areas and offer opportunities for change toward large-scale consumerism, more women in the workforce and longer employment. Another significant factor is the digital influence on site selection and development.

How does a planning background help respond to the trends?

THOMAS: The planning background helps give you a basic framework or understanding of the overall development process. It helps you work through the process and eliminate problems in the front end before they can become a major stumbling block to either the project or the company. It also gives you a baseline of understanding when dealing with specific projects and/or other local planning professionals who you rely on to assist you in responding to prospects and/or detailed project requirements.

JEANNETTE: During the last 20 years, planners have been exposed to a rapidly changing technology environment. Planners have used this trend to manage and



“Planners in central cities and first ring suburbs are becoming entrepreneurs, creating catalysts for change.”

— Frank Turner, FAICP

forecast many functional issues including water demand, transportation issues, workforce development and commercial development choices. Likewise, technology continues to influence how planners respond to a variety of issues ranging from the simple (notifications for hearings) to the more complex (site specific evaluations to include tree surveys, environmental hazards, and traffic generation).

FRANK: The knowledge and analytical skills of planners helps in understanding the impact and consequences of trends beyond those that are obvious. Identifying the latent effects of change, including the social and economic effects, is an area where planners

should possess an edge over many other areas of professional training.

“As a planner, I have more knowledge of the parcel simply because most people come to the planning department first.”

— Kimberly Jones



STEVE: Planners come to their job with a strong sense of stewardship for their service area that is driven by an understanding that the creation of livable communities is within the possible, and therefore must be within the probable. Every planner I work with is committed to social equity in planning processes and decision-making. Planners understand the power of commonly held information (data and GIS) to organize and unite constituencies. Planners, as professionals who manage complex technical information as a daily task, are seasoned and literate in the language of statistics. These are terrific assets to have when planning for regional economic development.

NED: A planning background provides several important skills and ways of thinking that are critical to successful economic development practice. Most importantly, it is the ability to view the community from a more holistic and integrated perspective. Understanding how the various functions of community inter-

PLANNERS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONT. FROM P. 16

connect and grow together should be one of the greatest assets that the planner brings to the table. Another valuable asset of the planner is his/her negotiation skills. Negotiation skills are critical in economic development and many aspects of planning due to the fact that many of the issues we deal with are contentious, require community consensus-building and political support. Lastly, planners seem to have a special ability to perform in-depth study and analysis on various issues which is fundamental to sound economic development policy and practice. Good economic base studies require careful analysis and presentation of data and findings. Well-conceived economic base studies allow planners to present a more comprehensive understanding of economic development related issues to elected and appointed officials. To be a successful economic development professional, one must vigorously show the high value-added that the planner brings to the job.

The planning and economic development professions have always enjoyed a pluralistic incline attracting people from a wide array of backgrounds. While the diverse backgrounds make the field richer, polarizing

debates tend to make the professions weak.

Mark Gerzon author of *Leading through Conflict* notes that organizations and communities are more interested in inclusive, respectful, and continuous dialogue instead of a debate between two know-it-alls, each sure that the other person is wrong. "Dialogue does not seek closure as debates do, but rather discovers new options, says Gerzon.

The six people interviewed in this article understand the importance of creating alliances between the two professions. The crossover between the two professions can spur new approaches to creating sustainable communities, and potentially create breakthroughs that could not be achieved individually by either profession. ■

Kaizer Rangwala, AICP, has practiced planning for more than 18 years. After working for Jersey City, Indianapolis, and Farmers Branch, he now serves as the Assistant Community Development Director at City of Ventura. He holds a master's in architecture from New Jersey Institute of Technology and a master's in city and regional planning from Rutgers University.

PLANNING TO SUSTAIN SMALL FARMS, CONT. FROM P. 10

gated Placer County's model of direct marketing to explore policy options to preserve agriculture in their own regions. Some leaders from counties with strapped fiscal budgets discounted the program's feasibility for replication due to Placer County's positive state of fiscal health. Leaders in Placer County, however, argue that money has not been the most important determinant of success. Rather, they argue that small-scale farming and the mandarin industry in particular have grown because of the county's "people capital." Success has occurred due to the awareness of agencies and the capacity of growers to promote the willingness to trust and change.

Although fiscal and land use policies such as zoning, urban growth boundaries, preferential taxation and easements may prevent the development of farm-

land, they do not address the market challenges that may hinder its cultivation. As a result, such policy approaches offer only a partial remedy for a struggling agricultural sector. If local agriculture is valued by a community, county governments, community leaders, and farmers can promote economic viability by creating an institutional system of economic development supports that promote collective efficiencies, trust among growers, and intersectoral linkages. As evidenced by the mandarin industry in Placer County, this process involves the commitment of all stakeholders and the ability to identify and adapt to market opportunities and constraints in small-scale agriculture. ■

Editor's note: the complete essay, along with references, is available from the author at janellesantos@gmail.com.

UPDATE YOUR APA PROFILE!

Because *News & Views* is a digital-only publication, it is very important that we have access to your current (working!) email address. To be sure that your contact information (including email, address,

telephone, etc.) is correctly reflected in your APA profile, go to www.planning.org/myprofile, enter your APA ID (from *Planning* magazine mailing label or invoice) and password (click on "create a new password" if you've forgotten it or do not have one) and verify or update your profile. If you need assistance, send a message to webmaster@planning.org.