

Sacramento Valley Section Planners Tabloid

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Feature Article

The Road Not Taken

By Richard H. Carson

- ◆ So you want to be a planner! So did I. I started working the permit counter as a young planner and never looked back. But I am here to tell you that you have a few decisions to make about your future. Do you want to be a private consultant or work in the government? Which government? You can work for a city, county, region, state or the feds. There are also non-profits for the more altruistic planner. Then there are different types of planners. Do you want to be a city planner, a natural resource planner or a transportation planner. Maybe you like historic preservation. Do you want to become more? Maybe you want to manage planners someday. Do you want to be a planning director? If you do, then ask yourself, "Who manages the chief planner?" Do you want to be that person? If you want to be a planner, then the career choices you will make are incredibly complex. Hey, it's just like planning.

This article is about you making professional choices about your future in planning. The poet laureate Robert Frost wrote, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." I know this road well and I have traveled it often. I have walked along the road less traveled to become the chief planner - several times.

I wrote this article because I recently stirred up a few planners when I posted a response on the planning website at Cyburbia. A college student asked about "...the likelihood of getting a decent planning job straight out of undergraduate studies?" I answered him as honestly as I could: "As a planning manager and professional for 25 years, I have some advice on advanced degrees: 1) If you are going to work in consulting, then you need an advanced planning degree. Consultants market expertise. 2) If you are going to work in government, then consider an MPA, or at least an MBA. In government you will advance because of your management and political skills, not because you are the best planner. That is why the AICP designation is such a joke. It actually works against you as you advance. It limits your ability to manage other professionals (i.e., engineers, building officials, scientists) because you are stereotyped."

An old way of thinking

Saying that the AICP designation is a joke sent a lot of planners into orbit and I got a lot of emotional e-mail. It made me spend sometime asking myself what I was thinking. I was trying to tell planners not to limit their professional horizons because the professional market place is changing. Many planners asked me how I could degrade their achievement of becoming a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). My answer is simple. Do you want to achieve something for your community or for yourself? Do you want to be professionally recognized because you simply passed some test? Personally and professionally, I want to be remembered as a person who cared about my community and profession.

The fact is that the history of the AICP is relatively recent. It was an attempt by planners to get the same historical recognition that many other professions had already achieved. The history of the late 1800s and early 1900s chronicles a long list of great public achievements in terms of constructing bridges, parks, canals, subways and buildings. Every profession wants to its contributions recognized and in an era of increased specialization planners wanted to be recognized.

American history recognizes the engineer Major Pierre L'Enfant for designing Washington, D.C. in the late 1700s. Then there was the landscape architect, Fredrick Law Olmstead, who designed New York's Central Park in 1858. However, I personally think it was the media attention given to the architect Frank Lloyd Wright's life and work, followed by Ayn Rand's book "The Fountainhead" (1943), and finally the movie of the same name starring Gary Cooper (1949) that drove the planners into a fury of professional envy. So planners pushed hard to get registered. However, only a handful of states ever went along with this idea. In America we may test and license food handlers and hairdressers, we sometimes register guns, but always register engineers and architects. And for a good reason. The reason planners failed to get registered has to do with public safety. Architects and engineers build structures that can fail and kill people. Planners build communities, but in today's world it takes 20 years to find out if we screwed up. People rarely die from a bad plan.

What right do I to make such judgements? Well, certainly I have a historical one. I joined the American Institute of Planners (AIP) in 1978. Sound familiar? It was the predecessor of the modern APA and AICP. My own empirical experience over the last 25 years has been that the larger planning agencies are managed by people who are not AICP. Lawyers seem to get a good share of the jobs, as do political hacks (the friends of politicians). This occurs because these positions are in reality political appointments. Uncertified planners, like me, occasionally get these jobs because we know something about politics, planning, the law and modern management.

Do we really want to register visionaries? We didn't have a political test for elected officials like JFK or FDR. Ask yourself, what if Albert Einstein had failed his IQ test. What if Picasso had failed his mental exam? What if Jane Jacobs had to take the AICP test? Did national columnist Neal Peirce? Our society would be so much less without these people.

We should never test the visionaries and critics of our generations. And this points to a hard question. Who are we and why are we taking tests? The answer is that we take them to prove we are worthy of the society we wish to join. The planning club. My friends, it is a worthy goal, but a shallow victory. I like the motto "register guns and not planners" better. If we register planners, then we are throwing away hundreds and thousands of visionaries.

A new professional paradigm

One of the changes to the planning profession that has occurred is also organizational. In the old model, every city or county had a separate planning director, a building official and a chief engineer. Each ran his or her own group and represented a completely independent step in the development review process. In the modern world of continuous improvement and quality teams, a new model has emerged. More local governments are moving to create a Community Development Department that integrates all three disciplines into a single team that works on applications as a group. Although you still need the expertise of the specific disciplines, you change the management responsibilities. The leaders of these three disciplines are being replaced a new model and a new kind of leader - a Community Development Department director. This person needs to understand the entire continuum of the process and the unique contributions of the individual disciplines. As planners, we must now aspire to be more than the planning director. In the new hierarchy, there are more planning managers and less planning directors. We need to look towards overseeing a department that embraces planning, engineering, building, code enforcement and sometimes even the fire marshal.

This presents us with a unique dilemma. As planners, we don't expect have a PE (for professional engineer) behind our name. We aren't trained in using the UBC (Uniform Building Code). So if we put AICP behind our names, then we are reminding our multi-disciplined teammates that we are planners - and they are not! You may get some short-term satisfaction from doing this, but it will work against you becoming their boss someday. I agree with the bandit in the movie Treasure of the Sierra Madre, "We don't need no stinking badges."

I find it curious and serious that the planning curriculum of academia does not require that students read such classics as the "Art of War" by the Chinese general Sun Tzu or "The Prince" by Renaissance statesman Niccolo Machiavelli. You see the art of planning is about policy making, politics and power. You don't have to be a politician to play political hardball. I have always wanted to teach a planning class in strategy and tactics because planners are so bad at it. How can we achieve anything if we don't know the damn rules of the game. 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 the political reality. In any culture there are ways to achieve cultural change, but you have to know the local rules before you can do anything.

What I am telling you is to be careful not to stereotype yourself. Keep your professional options open. I belong to a variety of associations. I am a member of the American Planning Association (APA), Urban Land Institute (ULI) and the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA). I don't aspire to retire as a "Fellow" of any of them, but I have contributed to all of them. And in turn they have all helped me to be who I am professionally. Sometimes I am a heretic and a contrarian, but I have the heart of a planner. It's just that I want to be more than a planner. I want to be a builder of community.

Richard H. Carson is a practicing planner of some 30 years. He currently manages 120 employees as director of the Clark County Department of Community Development in Vancouver, Washington. He is a past director of planning for Metro (the Portland, Oregon regional government, which represents 1 million people). He is also a past editor of the Oregon Planners' Journal and currently maintains the APA national website's Planning Editors Internet List. He is also an elected board member for the APA Oregon Chapter. You can reach him via the Internet at richcarson@msn.com or by visiting his website at <http://msnhomepages.talkcity.com/capitoldr/richcarson/richcarson.html>

A response to this article by Norm Krumholz, AICP - President of the AICP Commission will be printed in next month's newsletter. If you would like to express your views on this article please submit responses to Christy Warmerdam at 2233 Watt. Ave., Ste. 330, Sacramento, CA 95825 or Christy.Warmerdam@parsons.com.

Jobs Available

City of Santa Cruz

Associate Planner-Current/Future Planning

- ◆ City of Santa Cruz, CA, \$4,558-\$5,817 monthly, plus excellent management benefits. The City's Planning Department is expanding and recruiting for two new full-time positions. Responsibilities will include urban design and site analysis of large commercial and residential projects, development and plan review, beach revitalization, neighborhood conservation and preparation of staff reports. Requires a bachelor's degree in City Planning or a related field and three years of professional planning experience. A Master's degree in Planning may be substituted for two years of the required experience. **Apply by 9/29/00.** For required application materials contact 831-420-5040; TDD: 1-800-735- 2929. www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/ps EOE/ADA.

GREYSTONE Environmental Consultants, Inc

Senior Environmental Planners/Project Managers

- ◆ GREYSTONE Environmental Consultants, Inc., a premier consulting firm in the Western U.S., has 4 openings for Sr. Environmental Planners/Project Managers in our Sacramento office. Greystone is a full-service firm specializing in water resources, energy, mining and land use planning projects. Minimum qualifications include CEQA/NEPA report preparation, related permitting. Permitting includes Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Surface Mining and Reclamation Act, and Endangered Species Act/California Endangered Species Act. Power plant and water project experience a plus, strong writing skills a must. Greystone is an EOE offering competitive salary, medical/dental/vision benefits, 401K plan, flexible benefits plan and opportunity for advancement. Please visit our Website: www.greystone-consultants.com. Please send letter and resume Attn: Ms. Amber Martin by fax or email only: (916) 924-0779/amartin@greystone-consultants.com.

Announcements

New Dean

By Rich Callahan

- ◆ Daniel A. Mazmanian has been named by the University of Southern California as Dean of the School of Policy, Planning, and Development. An expert in the issues related to environmental sustainability, as well as in public policy implementation, Dr. Mazmanian earned his Ph.D. in political science from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. He has been dean of the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment for the past four years. His books include "Toward Sustainable Communities: Transition and Transformations in Environmental Policy" (1999), "Beyond Superfailure: America's Toxic Policy for the 1990s" (1992), and "Implementation and Public Policy" (1989). USC's Sacramento Center of the School of Policy, Planning, and Development is pleased to welcome Dean Mazmanian.



- ◆ The University of Southern California's Sacramento Center will host Open Houses on Thursday, September 21st at 5:30 PM and Saturday, September 23rd at 10AM to discuss USC's Sacramento Center master degree programs in planning and development and in public administration. USC offers a tuition discount of 20% to APA members. Please RSVP at 916-442-6911 or sacto@usc.edu.

Annual CPF Auction

- ◆ The California Planning Foundation (CPF) is the chapter's nonprofit foundation responsible for providing continuing education opportunities to practicing planners and providing scholarships to students in the state's accredited planning programs. Established in 1971, CPF relies on the generous donations of our members and fund-raising programs during the year to endow the student scholarship program. CPF is seeking your participation by attending the Annual Auction to be held on the evening of September 17 in Long Beach at the Conference headquarters. Please plan on attending this important event and remember to bring your cash and checks.

Pew Center for Civic Journalism

- ◆ The Washington-based Pew Center for Civic Journalism has announced its next round of funding for innovative projects that involve citizens in the reporting of local or regional public issues. October 2, 2000, is the deadline for proposals. While the funding is available only to news organizations, planners may wish to take this opportunity to propose a journalism project with media partners that will advance public understanding of area planning issues and promote greater civic participation. For more information, see APA's web site under Public Information/Notices (www.planning.org/info/call11.htm).

Planning to Publish?

- ◆ Planner's Casebook, the quarterly publication of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) is now seeking new case studies for publication. Each case study is designed to be a "quick read," providing critical insight into how real like planning projects work - or don't work, and defining key issues, opportunities, and actors that influence an outcome. Each case study concludes with lessons learned - the real life trials and errors in the course of a planning project. If you think you may have a topic suitable for an upcoming Casebook, please contact: Ms. Roshi Pelaseyed, AICP, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. Tel: (202) 872-0611 Fax: (202) 872-0643. E-mail: rpelaseyed@planning.org.

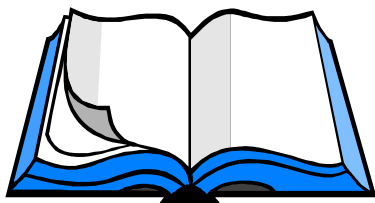
APA Audio Conference Training Series

- ◆ The American Planning Association and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy have the perfect answer to up-to-the-minute training that's both low-cost and convenient. The audio conference is delivered to you live over a speaker telephone. All you do is assemble your group around the phone and dial the toll-free number provided to you in your registration materials. You can train your entire group (no size limit) for as little as \$90. All programs are one hour in length and are held on Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m., eastern time. Each program is scripted for an audio format and engages the listener in a lively discussion. Questions can be faxed to the speaker ahead of time or posed directly during the discussion. Classes include: Affordable Housing - Oct. 4, 2000; Reinventing the Strip - Dec. 6, 2000; Economic Development and Changing Communities - Feb. 7, 2001; and Using Scientific Information for Better Planning - May, 23, 2001. With your registration you receive reading materials, an agenda, and instructions on joining the program and asking questions. If you have additional questions, please call Jerieshia Jones at 312-431-9100 or email: jjones@planning.org. The early registration deadline is Sept. 15, 2000.

Board Update

Education Vouchers and Grants Available

- ◆ The Sacramento Valley Section APA has purchased a second block of 20 vouchers for a \$25 discount on enrollment fees for a class in the Land Use and Natural Resources program at the University of California, Davis University Extension. If you've picked out a class at the Extension and are ready to send in your registration fee, contact Michael Johnson, at mjohnson@folsom.ca.us or at (916) 355-7224. After checking your membership status, he'll put a voucher in the mail.



- ◆ The Sacramento Center for the University of Southern California is offering a tuition fellowship to Sacramento chapter APA members of \$600 for each of the first three classes in the Master degree of Planning and Development (MPDS) or



the Master of Public Administration (MPA). This fellowship grant is available to APA members who meet the program admission. For more information, please contact Rich Callahan, Center Director at (916) 442-6911 or rcallaha@usc.edu.

Advertise Your Business in the Newsletter

- ◆ The Planners Tabloid is an important tool for those in the planning field. This newsletter is circulated throughout the Sacramento Valley, and is an excellent opportunity for planning firms to expose themselves to planners in their region. If you are interested in placing an ad in the Consultants Directory, please submit your artwork, and a check for \$150 for one year of advertising. Make checks payable to the Sacramento Valley Section APA and send your check and artwork to: Christy Warmerdam, Newsletter Editor, 2233 Watt Ave., Suite 330, Sacramento, CA 95825.

2001 California Chapter Conference

- ◆ The Sacramento Valley Section is sponsoring the 2001 California Chapter Conference. The conference dates are October 20 through 22, 2001. If you are willing to serve on a conference committee, contact Terry Rivasplata at (916) 737-3000. The more participants we have helping reduces the individual time commitment of our members.

Sacramento Valley Section Display Booths Available

- ◆ The Sacramento Valley Section has two display booths available for rent to our members and local jurisdictions. Each booth measures approximately 10 feet wide by 8 feet tall and is easy to set up and take down. The booths are black in color and materials can be mounted to the display with Velcro™. Each booth can be rented for \$250 per week. To find out more or to reserve a booth for your next event, call Richard Rust at (916) 446-0653.

Changing Your Address?

- ◆ If you are changing your address, please send change of address notices directly to APA in Chicago, 122 So. Michigan Ave, Ste. 1600, Chicago, IL 60603 attn: Membership Department or 312-431-9100 (phone), 312-431-9985 (fax), email to AddressChange@planning.org. If you receive a hardcopy of the newsletter please notify the newsletter editor of your address change in addition to the Membership Department in Chicago.



Looking for the Most Current and Comprehensive SVSAPA Information?

- ◆ Submit your email address to Rick Rust (rick_rust@urscorp.com) if you would like to be placed on the electronic notification system. This system sends information in a more timely fashion and saves the Sacramento Valley Section money that can be better spent on programs and other events that make the SVSAPA a valuable planner's resource. By submitting your email address, you will receive notification of newsletter placement on the website as well as instant notification of upcoming Section events not listed in the hardcopy newsletter. The Sacramento Valley Section website offers more current and comprehensive section information—www.sactoapa.org.

This newsletter is published monthly by the Sacramento Valley Section, California Chapter, of the American Planning Association. It is produced by Christy Warmerdam at Parsons Harland Bartholomew & Associates, Inc. We welcome and encourage readers to submit any planning related news or announcements. Submissions should be mailed c/o Parsons Harland Bartholomew & Associates, Inc., 2233 Watt Avenue, Suite 330, Sacramento, CA 95825. For info about articles or advertising, phone Christy at (916) 483-0481 or e-mail at Christy.Warmerdam@parsons.com.

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