

The Buffalo-Niagara Plan-Net

Fall 2017

Editor's Report

Commentary: deconstructing planning using cross border dialogue.

*"In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless,
but planning is indispensable."*

Attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Introduction: Cross border dialogue benefits planners from New York State and the Province of Ontario. We share an international tourist destination, hydroelectric power, and entry points to both nations. Thirty planners, equally drawn from the Western New York APA Section and OPPI's Western Lake Ontario District met on April 26, 2017 at the Ming Teh Restaurant. We shared excellent Chinese food, beer and wine and lively conversation in a dining room overlooking the Niagara River.

To facilitate dialogue, we seated APA and OPPI members evenly at tables, taking into account employment: consulting or municipal; planning function: management or design/analysis; and education: students or educators. Participants discussed three scenarios:

1. Following introductions, describe what you did in the office yesterday.
2. APA members imagined Erie County and the City of Buffalo were one municipality and planning decisions had to be consistent with a State policy statement. Alternatively OPPI members imagined Niagara Region provided advice to area municipalities and municipal planning decisions didn't need to conform to the Regional Official Plan or be consistent with Provincial policy.
3. APA members improvised AICP membership came with exclusive use of the term "Registered Professional Planner" while OPPI members imagined membership didn't include exclusive use of this term.

The Conversations: During discussions, the following observations on planning activity were made:

Planners provide advice on public policy and land use and act as agents between parties where discussions with municipalities, agencies and the public occur.

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In New York State, planners work with applied sciences, facts and ordinance and municipal standards when reviewing planning applications. In Ontario, planners interpret policy and provide advice on consistency with that policy using statements of fact when reviewing planning applications.

In New York State, ordinances and other municipal standards are designed to achieve accepted standards of public welfare, safety and equity. In Ontario, plans and zoning bylaws are designed to achieve Provincial policy for communities and locally generated policy.



In New York State, lawyers oversee ordinance drafting and application of municipal ordinances. Case law and legal principles apply to both drafting and application. In Ontario, administrative tribunals review municipal planning decisions. Planners provide advice on whether decisions are consistent with Provincial policy and conform to official plans and zoning bylaws.

The City of Buffalo and Erie County have 64 separate municipal and service organizations. In Niagara Region, the municipal governments can be counted on one's fingers.

In New York State, some municipalities employ no planners while Ontario municipalities are well staffed by comparison. Alternatively, innovative municipal plans and ordinances such as Buffalo's Green Code and the One Region Forward initiative appear more common in New York State.

Citizen planners and "not for profit" trusts are more influential in New York State than in Ontario. Standardized opportunities for municipal public participation are provided by regulation and administrative tribunal policy in Ontario.

Professional membership as a Registered Professional Planner is of paramount importance in Ontario because planners provide opinion evidence to administrative tribunals and municipal councils. Alternatively, AICP membership isn't understood as being required to practice planning in New York State.



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Given the number of municipalities and servicing organizations in New York State, local planning consultancies compete with larger practices for a wider range of municipal planning assignments. In Ontario, Provincial standardization of policy interpretation and analysis and municipal consolidation has stimulated consolidation of different professions, including planning, into larger centralized commercial consulting practices.

In Ontario, consistency means making planning decisions consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement. In New York State, consistency means making decisions that are consistent with a larger professional code of practice as well as factually conforming to municipal ordinances and standards.

Conclusion: Planning is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it stands for a professional domain. As a verb, it includes activities that vary depending upon the tools employed, what is being planned and the places where analysis and decisions are made.

The Ming Teh Restaurant dialogue on April 26 2017 explored the varieties of planning practice on both shores of the Niagara River and expanded our understanding of activities we cherish.



Adopt-a-Beach Clean-up Event

On September 23, 2017 the WNY APA, in coordination with the Alliance for the Great Lakes, held a Beach Clean-up event at Gallagher Beach, located at Buffalo Harbor State Park on Buffalo's Outer Harbor. The Alliance for the Great Lakes, formed in 2006, focus is to educate, promote, encourage, and advocate the on-going effort to make the five great lakes a healthier, and cleaner environment for both wildlife and humans.

The WNY APA reached out to the Alliance to assist with the coordination of an Adopt a Beach cleanup event that yielded three trash bags of debris weighing about 9.5 lbs. In total, WNY APA members with representatives from the Alliance recovered about 1,000 pieces of debris. Data showed that the most common debris type recovered was plastic pieces, and everyday food paper wrappers. Noted by Alliance representatives, plastic is one of the most often recovered pieces of debris across the five great lakes. Debris was tallied by forms provided from the Alliance, and data will be entered into their online data base for research purposes. Adopt-A-Beach cleanup events are usually held in early spring to late fall, and interested volunteers are welcome to visit the Alliance for The Great Lakes website to learn more about their mission and sign up for a local clean up event.



Upcoming Events:

Sunday, November 5th, 2017: Wine Tasting in WNY

Winter 2018: Curling at Buffalo River Works (tentative)

February 2018: Student-Professional Mixer at the Steer Restaurant & Saloon

May 2018: Annual Awards Event

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