

# The Best of the Best

**B**ACK IN APRIL 2016, this column reviewed four papers shortlisted for the *Journal of the American Planning Association's* 2015 Article of the Year. There was some consternation at the time, as if reviewing four articles and ultimately declaring only one the winner might somehow diminish the other three. But when hundreds of papers are submitted to *JAPA* each year, and dozens are published, the runner-up spot isn't a bad place to be in. And I like featuring multiple articles in a single column; it neatly illustrates the breadth of our field.

This year, the new editor of *JAPA*, Ann Forsyth of Harvard University, has given me permission to announce the four finalists without revealing the winner. "To me, it is a bit like an honorable mention," she says.

Here are the four finalists for 2018's *JAPA* Article of the Year, nominated by a working group of the journal's associate editors. The winner will be selected based on a vote of all of *JAPA's* associate editors and announced in the May issue of *Planning* magazine. Stay tuned.

**"Kevin Lynch in Los Angeles,"**

by Meredith Drake Reitan and Tridib Banerjee (Vol. 84, Issue 3-4)

To trace the influence of the famed urban designer and theorist Kevin Lynch on downtown Los Angeles's development, Reitan and Banerjee delve into planning history. The authors blend archival research; interviews with planners, historians, and public officials involved in developing and implementing the city's plans during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s; and Lynch's own writing to flesh out the story of how his ideas about empowering citizens in the planning process were implemented and distorted during the late 20th century. His refusal to offer "concrete and reproducible design solutions" like form-based codes or the visionary plans created by Pierre L'Enfant, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Daniel Burnham means his influence on the built environment was less direct than these earlier generations of planners.

The story is fascinating, and the authors' conclusion that Lynch's legacy

is more an approach to development than a "permanent imprint" on the fabric of the city raises new possibilities for what it means to be a planner.

**"Planning for Mixed Use: Affordable for Whom?"**

by Markus Moos, Tara Vinodrai, Nick Revington, and Michael Seasons (Vol. 84, Issue 1)

How can you beat my favorite article, which combines the subjects of mixed use zoning and housing affordability?

Planners typically advocate mixed use zoning as a way of reducing sprawl, creating energetic and lively neighborhoods, promoting active transportation, reducing auto use, and promoting economic growth by attracting new and cutting-edge industries. But is there a dark side to mixed use zoning?

The article uses longitudinal data to

examine housing affordability for different types of workers in mixed use zones of Toronto compared with the rest of the city and metropolitan region. Using three different affordability metrics, they find evidence that indicates that by raising the amenity value of specific locations, mixed use zones have experienced larger declines in affordability than the rest of the city and metropolitan region, and that this impact is larger for occupational groups whose incomes are negatively influenced by shifts toward a knowledge-based economy.

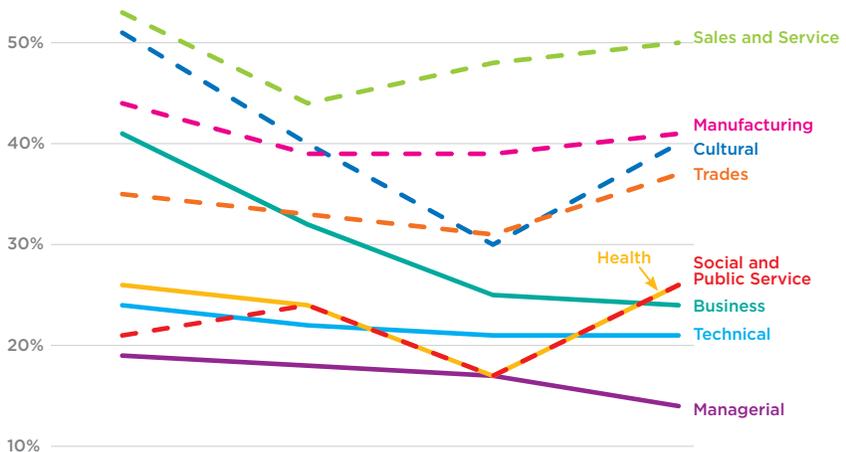
"Inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, and housing trusts offer the potential to address Toronto's challenges of reduced housing affordability in mixed-use zones, especially for low-skill, low-income workers," the authors conclude.

Findings from Toronto may have implications for other North American cities experiencing similar changes in housing markets and occupational structure. In regions with housing affordability issues, including my own home of Salt Lake City, these tools should be applied to more than mixed use zones.

I recently helped complete a survey of the 10 largest cities in the state of Utah; only seven are taking advantage of one of these three tools in the agreed-upon regional quest for more affordable housing.

**MIXED USE ZONING: AFFORDABLE FOR WHOM?**

From "Planning for Mixed Use" (*JAPA*, 2018), rental costs as a percentage of various salaries.



SOURCE: "PLANNING FOR MIXED USE: AFFORDABLE FOR WHOM?"

**“Navigating Statistical Uncertainty: How Urban and Regional Planners Understand and Work with American Community Survey (ACS) Data for Guiding Policy,”** by Jason R. Jurjevich, Amy L. Griffin, Seth E. Spielman, David C. Folch, Meg Merrick, and Nicholas N. Nagle (Vol. 84, Issue 2)

It won't come as a surprise that many planners have trouble calculating and communicating statistical uncertainty when using American Community Survey data. According to the authors, about one-third of practicing planners lack key knowledge of how uncertainty in ACS samples affects the reliability of the data, and almost a quarter admit to not paying much attention to the issue at all. In today's data-driven policy landscape, accessible and reliable socioeconomic data are the foundation of many decisions.

The authors make the case that failing to deal with data-reliability problems violates the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Dealing with high levels of uncertainty is particularly a challenge for planners working at the city and neighborhood scales, because the data for smaller geographical areas is derived from smaller samples and contains proportionately higher levels of uncertainty.

Happily, they also point to solutions. Jurjevich et al. have developed a set of guidelines for dealing with statistical uncertainty in ACS data, and they call for more professional training through APA to provide the skills necessary to do so. It's a practical—and critical—prescription for improving planning practice.

**“Estimates of Transaction Costs in Transfer of Development Rights Programs,”** by Sina Shahab, J. Peter Clinch, and Eoin O'Neill (Vol. 84, Issue 1)

The authors identify an important public-policy challenge by examining the transaction costs of public and private parties in countywide transfer-of-development-rights programs in Maryland.

TDR programs encourage conservation of farmland and natural areas by creating a market allowing private landowners in sending areas to sell

development rights that entitle denser development in receiving areas. In theory, they achieve conservation goals in a more economically efficient way than regulations like zoning because they compensate landowners for the loss of development potential. However, high transaction costs for land surveys, sales brokers, and attorneys reduce that efficiency significantly and can result in less land conserved.

To develop an estimate of transaction costs, the authors interviewed a sample of 46 participants in four county-wide TDR programs in Maryland, including landowners, developers, program administrators, and intermediaries like land-use attorneys. They find that transaction costs can add 13 to 21 percent of the total TDR payments in individual deals, and that private actors pay the vast majority of these costs, which creates both efficiency and equity concerns.

Shahab, Clinch, and O'Neill argue that simplifying TDR administrative processes and creating a larger role for planners to serve as brokers between TDR buyers and sellers could go a long way in reducing transaction costs and improving overall effectiveness of the program. This finding is consistent with my earlier column, “When Quantitative Research Trumps Qualitative—What Makes Transfer of Development Rights Work?” (January 2009). ■

—Reid Ewing

Ewing is a distinguished professor of city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah, an associate editor of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, and an editorial board member of the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, and *Cities*. David Proffitt, a visiting assistant professor at the University of Utah, helped with the research for and writing of this column. More than 60 past Research You Can Use columns are available at <https://bit.ly/2E5tt85>.

Planning (ISSN 0001-2610) is published by the American Planning Association, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601. APA's membership includes 11 issues annually of *Planning*. From membership dues, \$30 is the subscription fee for *Planning*. Nonmember subscribers pay \$85 a year for 11 issues annually of *Planning* (\$120 foreign). Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois, and at additional mailing offices. *Planning* is a registered trademark. Copyright 2019 by the American Planning Association. Reprint permission must be requested in writing from APA. Attn: Postmaster and subscribers please send change of address to: *Planning*, Subscription Department, American Planning Association, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601; 312-431-9100. Please supply both old and new addresses. Attn: Canadian Postmaster By Canadian agreement 40033287, Canadian return mail should be addressed to Station A, P.O. Box 54, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J5.



# IDEAS CONNECT US



Share the thrill  
of inspiration delivered  
by our keynote  
speakers—violinist  
Vijay Gupta and  
documentarian Brett Culp.

[planning.org/NPC19](https://planning.org/NPC19)

