
Planning for Equity in a Local Context

Case Studies from the North Carolina chapter of the American Planning Association Contributors

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With an introduction from Ben Hitchings, NC-APA President

Editors' Note: Carolina Planning regularly publishes a feature highlighting projects from members of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAPA). This year's submissions focus on initiatives that are addressing equity issues in North Carolina communities. From case studies discussing health impact assessments to articles highlighting the importance of using data to help inform equitable planning activities and funding, these writers provide valuable insights into the important role North Carolina planners play in shaping the futures of their communities.

Acting For Equity

Ben Hitchings

My favorite line in the Pledge of Allegiance is “with liberty and justice for all.” But what exactly is “justice”, and what does it mean for our professional practice?

I think of “justice” as “fairness” with some determination behind it. If a Shakespearean actor was describing fairness and the director said “once more, with feeling”, the result would be justice. The term communicates a strong commitment to right inequities of the past and the present.

Signs of inequity are not hard to find. In North Carolina alone, one in every six residents is living in poverty, for a total of more than 1.5 million people (U.S. Census 2010). Clearly, there is much work to be done. But how do we move from values to action?

The AICP Code of Ethics provides some guidance, stating our commitment to “seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and social integration.” As we work to enable all stakeholders to participate in the decisions that affect them, we must make a special effort to empower the disadvantaged and help provide opportunities for them to improve their lives.

The AICP Code then goes on to say that “We shall

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urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs.” In other words, each of us must be a positive force for advancing the goal of social justice.

The authors in this issue of the Carolina Planning Journal take the next step, providing tangible examples of programs that put these words into action. They describe how to:

- Improve the life chances of young males of color through a focused program of affection, protection, correction, and connection.
- Expand access to healthy, locally grown foods;
- Improve safety and access to transit service;
- Advance public health by considering the health impacts of planning decisions;
- Institutionalize the process of integrating immigrants into local communities;

In so doing, these authors provide real world examples of how we can implement our core beliefs through our professional practice.

Each one of us may not always have the opportunity to develop full-fl edged programs to advance the cause of social equity, but we can often fi nd ways to integrate this consideration into our daily practice. The articles in this issue provide an inventory of opportunities that we can draw upon to help us in this task. And if at times our energy for equity starts to lag, remember to do it “once more with feeling” in order to follow through on our pledge to work for liberty and justice for all.