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Planning for Equitable Development: Social Equity by Design

By Carlton C. Eley

In July 2016, the *SDG Index and Dashboards* was released to give the 193 member states of the United Nations an instrument to track progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals that were adopted in 2015 (United Nations 2015). The report card ranked the U.S. 25th, with a score of 72.7 out of 100. In comparison, Canada came in 13th, with a score of 76.8 (Bertelsmann Stiftung & SDSN 2016).

The ranking affirms that the U.S. has a significant inequality problem. It scored in the red, or "seriously far from achievement," in 12 of 17 of the sustainable development goals, including several relevant to sustainability and community quality of life: "no poverty," "zero hunger," "gender equality," "reduced inequalities," and "peace, justice and strong institutions." The poor rankings reveal the U.S. has too many people below the poverty line, too much adult obesity, too little renewable energy, too many homicides and people in prison, and other failings (Mooney 2016).

Although U.S. cities and towns are directing more attention to advancing sustainability as a planning solution, it is clear that serious questions that require attention remain. Where are the blind spots in addressing social equity alongside the environment and the economy, and how can they be corrected?

Equitable development is an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant. It complements the goals of previous planning strategies dating back to 1965, including advocacy planning, equity planning, and equity development. In an era where sustainability is gaining traction, equitable development demonstrates sustainable outcomes are socially responsible as well.

This *PAS Memo* defines equitable development and explores how it can expand choice and opportunity for all. Community planners can be stewards of community trust as well as stewards of the built environment; the two goals are not mutually exclusive. In an era of rapid change, this *PAS Memo* is a reminder that planners are uniquely positioned to set a higher standard for sustainable and equitable community efforts.

Gentrification: A Shared Problem

"Gentrification" has become as contested as formally acknowledging the cause of the American Civil War (NPS 2011). The term was coined by the London-based urban sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 (Urban Lab 2015). Her word choice was not arbitrary or mere wordplay. The objective interpretation of gentrification is found in the etymology of the term. The literal translation is "a condition made upper class" or "the action of making upper class."

In the U.S., gentrification can be defined as "the process of neighborhood change that occurs as places of lower real

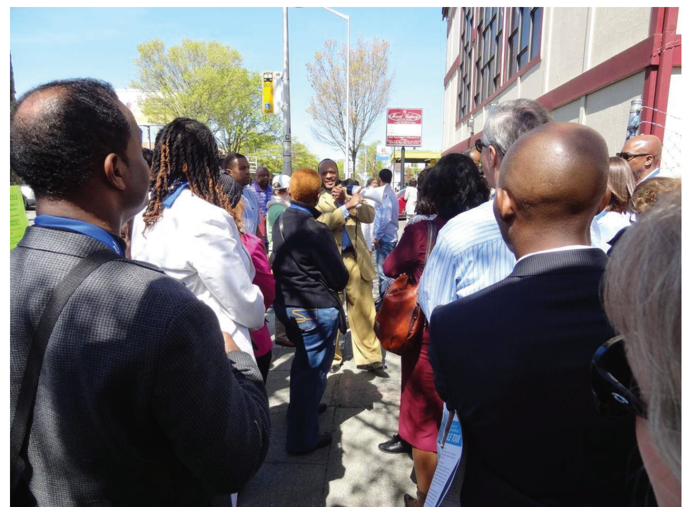

Figure 1. Reggie Witherspoon, Sr. of Mount Calvary Christian Center comments on the ironies of gentrification, such as sharing a property line with a marijuana shop, during a mobile tour of the Capital Hill District of Seattle at the 2015 National Planning Conference. Photo by Carlton Eley.

estate value are transformed into places of higher real estate value" (U.S. EPA n.d.b). Though the improvements to physical and economic infrastructure may contribute to job growth, a larger tax base, higher property values, and opportunities to expand services or offer new ones, the important question of who benefits from these improvements is often overlooked. Gentrification may compromise long-standing cultural assets and cherished institutions of a community, and if community improvements are neither affordable nor accessible to long-standing residents, such changes are not socially responsible or sustainable (Figure 1, p.1).

There are those who take umbrage at the term, but that is tantamount to being offended by objective facts (Slater 2011). Patterns of development and urban policymaking that subordinate the needs of persons who have waited the longest for relief by diverting attention to populations who are more well off is not hyperbole. For 20 years, urban enthusiasts have directed inordinate attention to preferential groups—the middle class, the creative class, baby boomers, millennials, artists, and the like—while attention to vulnerable groups still in need has been conspicuously inadequate.

No one questions the need to improve communities. However, the means to getting there is just as important as the end. Place-based solutions that simply improve the environment and boost the economy while failing to address poverty and inequality are not sustainable. Although these approaches may be environmentally friendly, resource efficient, climate resilient, or profitable, their attention to issues targeting the social pillar of sustainability, particularly social equity, leaves a lot to be desired.

Raising the Bar for Sustainability Efforts

Gentrification is a lot like manufacturing. There is a tendency to excuse the problems while focusing on the benefits. Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans characterized gentrification as a good problem to have (Persica 2014). As in the case of manufacturing, some consumers may accept collateral damage in exchange for the great satisfaction offered by the product. In the past, most manufacturing was done without adequate regard for the welfare of people, nature, and future generations (Wise Geek n.d.).

Like manufacturing, gentrification can produce externalities. In economics, an externality is "a side effect or consequence of an industrial or commercial activity that affects other parties without being reflected in the costs of the good or services involved" (Schiller 1994). There may be a general sense of apathy if externalities are positive, but externalities are extremely frustrating when they are negative.

The externalities from gentrification are a form of market failure. A "good problem" does not mean it is benign. When market failures are carelessly repeated rather than mitigated, undesirable outcomes can be scaled up rather than addressed when they are manageable. Extreme examples of market failure include climate change and the housing–financial asset bubble (Sorscher 2013).

In the case of manufacturing, public expectations have matured over time. Today, more manufacturers realize their growth and competitiveness is linked to the integrity of their brand, and a company's brand is only as good as the production process for its merchandise (U.S. Department of Commerce 2011). Maturing expectations are a motivating factor for "sustainable manufacturing." In a like manner, citizens need planning and development practices that are responsible and subscribe to a higher standard. If planners do not think critically about how to meet the needs of vulnerable populations properly, communities will fall short in ensuring everyone has a safe and healthy environment in which to live, work, and play.

Reaching a Tipping Point

There is much to celebrate in the resurgence of cities (and existing communities) in the United States, but an honest critique suggests there are citizens and practitioners who are befuddled, frustrated, and weary with present outcomes, specifically:

- Enduring the long burden of community disinvestment while having no pathway to enjoy the long-term benefits of community stabilization
- Development projects that compromise cultural treasures and heritage assets
- A trend of "opportunity hoarding," or distorting institutional frameworks in favor of more powerful interests, that adds to the creation of a permanent underclass
- The false promise of trickle-down benefits that justify orienting development around the needs of well-heeled populations
- Accommodating new markets while failing to adequately respond to the basic human needs of existing markets
- A research narrative that, until recently, left the accomplishments of underserved populations as community builders in the shadows

At the American Planning Association's 2016 Policy and Advocacy Conference, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) referred to the problem as "an urban revival for the affluent" (Williams 2016). ULI's observation is an important reminder that the future will always be informed by the choices that we make. A sustainable future will not be determined exclusively by how well settlement patterns are managed, but will require being equally astute about managing social impacts. Stewards of the built environment will need to encourage outcomes that are just and equitable as well as smart and green.

Sustainability cannot conveniently divorce itself from its social pillar just as professional planners cannot temporarily excuse themselves from their Code of Ethics and Professional Practice (APA 2016). If the prospect of addressing or managing gentrification is a point of discomfort, perhaps planners (and allied professionals) need to accept that their well-intentioned community improvements are not truly sustainable. The consequences of falling short will be that future generations will inherit the responsibility to manage the intensified inequities that the current generation chose not to resolve (Eley 2010).

What Is Equitable Development?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, equitable development is an approach for meeting the needs of

underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant (U.S. EPA n.d.b). Equitable development expands choice and opportunity, encourages sustainable outcomes, and improves quality of life while mitigating impacts from activities that society considers beneficial.

Equitable Development and Environmental Justice
Equitable development was not conceived by the EPA; PolicyLink has been the nation's leading proponent for the approach. Still, EPA's environmental justice portfolio has been the driver for many creative actions which complement equitable development as well as the forerunners to the approach (Figure 2).

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (U.S. EPA n.d.c).

In recent years, the term "place-based" has become a popular watchword among planners and allied professionals. In many ways, equitable development is a place-based approach for encouraging environmental justice. Although the public is accustomed to discussions about environmental justice framed in the context of the law, public health, and waste management, the planning and design professions are equally important means for correcting problems that beset communities overburdened by pollution and remain underserved (Eley 2013).

The 1996 report Environmental Justice, Urban Revitalization, and Brownfields: The Search for Authentic Signs of Hope, published by the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, clearly outlined the nexus between environmental justice, land use, and sustainability. The report identified the environmental benefits of urban redevelopment and emphasized that the best outcomes would come about through an inclusive process. Equally important, the report serves as a clear statement that low-income and minority populations have always been concerned about the built environment.

Since 1996, researchers, advocates, practitioners, and community builders have demonstrated that equitable development does not shift attention from making communities better. Instead, it results in better community outcomes, especially for underserved populations and vulnerable groups.

Principles of Equitable Development
When it comes to how the built environment is planned and developed, principles have been an important cornerstone for the New Urbanism, Smart Growth, and varying livable community discussions. Principles translate definitions (and professional jargon) into tangible and easy to grasp concepts. Also, principles serve as benchmarks that help citizens, practitioners, and public officials understand whether they are moving in the right direction. In other words, principles point to actions/activities that support reaching a desired end state.

The following principles of equitable development (Eley 2009) were framed by an EPA civil servant after studying the

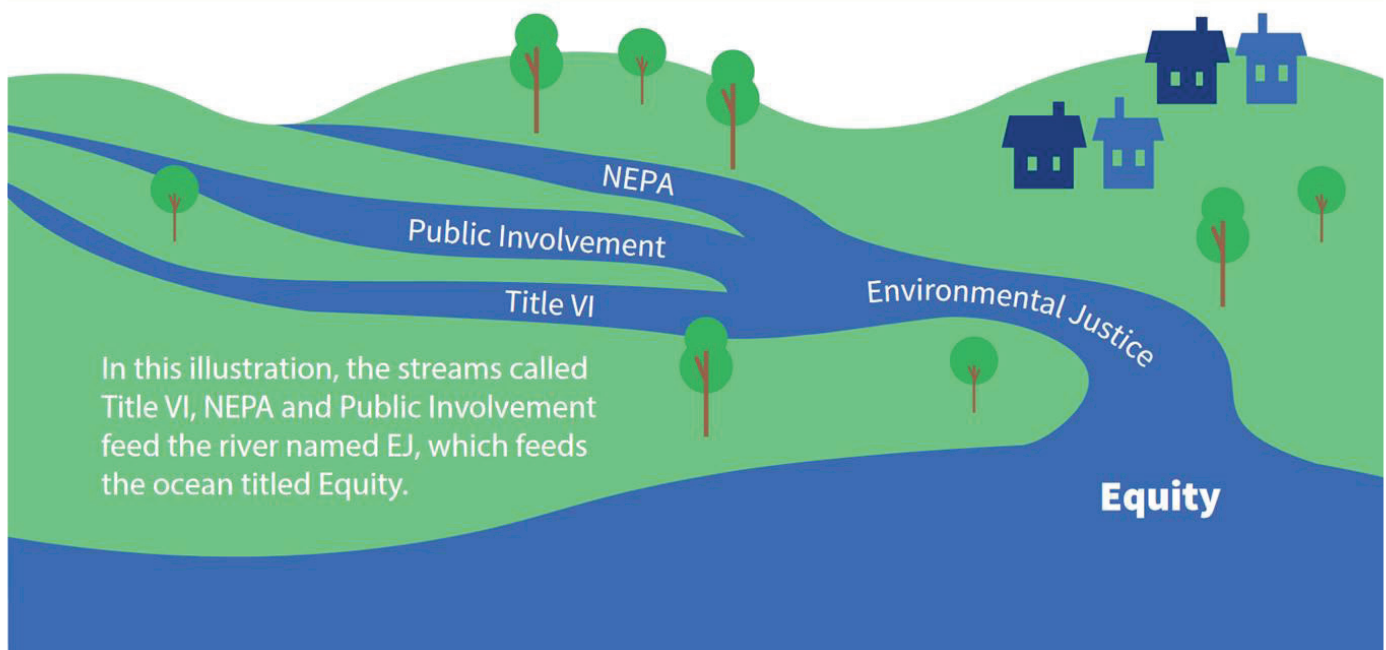

Figure 2. An illustration from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Toolkit affirms environmental justice is an important consideration in broader dialogues about equity. Courtesy U.S. DOT (www.transportation.gov/LeadershipAcademy).

lessons from successful projects in 2007; they are summarized below.

1. *Housing Choice* acknowledges that the provision of decent housing at varying price points is important and housing is just one of many factors that must be addressed for improving quality of life in underserved communities.
2. *Transportation Choice* emphasizes the importance of providing citizens with viable transportation alternatives, including pedestrian-oriented modes that meet their daily needs and lifestyles.
3. *Personal Responsibility* highlights the importance of change agents, either individuals or groups such as a neighborhood association, that work effectively with citizens as catalysts to put communities back on track.
4. *Capacity Building* considers the importance of effective outreach, education, and technical assistance for fostering inclusive communities and wise consumers by identifying untapped audiences, reaching out to them, and building new partnerships.
5. *Healthy Communities* considers health in the broadest sense: wellness, safety, support of physical activity, access to nutritious food, and environmental justice.
6. *Heritage Preservation* considers the value of historic buildings, landmarks, and monuments while honoring the narratives, the institutions, and cultural presence that contribute to a sense of place.
7. *Stewardship* is an ethic that suggests one accepts the responsibility to be a custodian of the assets in their domain and pass the assets on to another generation.
8. *Entrepreneurship* is the act of organizing or managing a business or enterprise. Benefits include creating jobs, growing the local economy, capturing dollars in the community, and building the tax base.
9. *Sustainable Wealth Creation* refers to financial intelligence. Sustainable wealth creation can counter generations of persistent poverty by providing individuals, families, and communities with the tools for managing money, making sound financial decisions, and building wealth.
10. *Civic Engagement* is part of the public life of living in a community. Citizens are their own best advocates, and attending public forums such as council meetings or planning meetings is important because individual opinions and perspectives matter.
11. *From Good to Great through Planning and Design, Standard of Excellence* acknowledges that communities require an investment of time, energy, preparation, and planning. Also, it is important to help citizens to make informed decisions to encourage development that complements rather than detracts from the community.

Equitable development is the sum of its parts, and the synergy from integrating the principles into standard planning practice fosters community parity. Encouraging equitable development supports the established claim that planning at

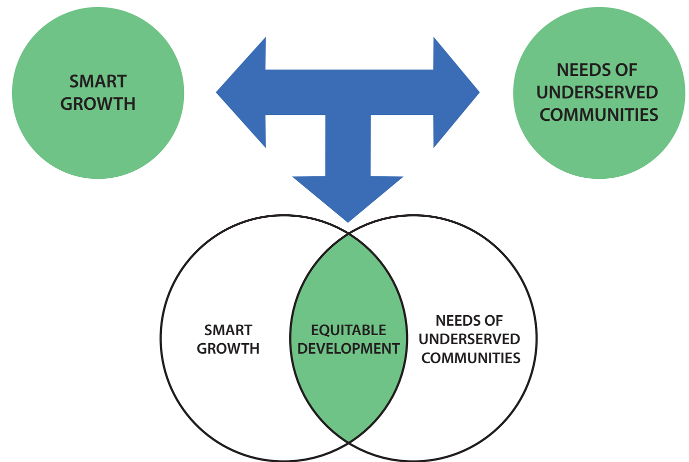

Figure 3. Model of equitable development. Courtesy Carlton Eley.

its best takes account of the social implications of land use and economic development decisions (ICMA 1988) (Figure 3).

Equitable Development in Action

The approaches for encouraging sustainable communities are expansive and include concepts like equitable development. Many urban policy and place-making discussions are punctuated by a focus on creativity.

There are few actions that compare to the creativity of underserved populations and vulnerable groups who are self-determined to guide the changes that occur within their community rather than react to them. The following examples point to clear outcomes and tangible results that demonstrate the application of equitable development as a means to rebuild America's communities.

Westside Specific Plan in National City, California

National City is the second oldest city in San Diego County, California. Industrial uses were permitted in the Old Town area of National City as a driver for economic development in the 1940s. Within 40 years, National City was overwhelmed by incompatible land uses that were interspersed throughout the residential community, including the Interstate 5 freeway, the port terminal, multiple industrial and emission sources, and high concentrations of auto-related businesses.

Eventually, relief for residents came in the form of a community plan that was prepared to resolve conflicting land uses. The Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), a San Diego/Tijuana region community-based organization, spearheaded the neighborhood planning process. Starting in 2003, EHC assisted community residents to frame their neighborhood vision and express their aspirations for a healthy community, and they worked with local government to develop the Westside Specific Plan (Figure 4, p. 5). The plan builds on an amortization ordinance passed by the city in 2006 for phasing out noncompatible land uses.

Adopted in 2010, the plan features public transit, a public park, and biking and walking paths, and it includes the Paradise Creek affordable housing project. Because the design elements

Figure 4. Residents of National City, California, engage in community planning to overcome injustice through the Westside Specific Plan. Photo by Carolina Martínez.

Figure 5. State Representative Harold Mitchell receives the 2015 National Planning Excellence Award for Advancing Diversity and Social Change (in Honor of Paul Davidoff). Photo by Carlton Eley.

offer co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, projects in the Westside Specific Plan are eligible for funding from California's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (Johnston 2016).

Also, National City has been designated a "disadvantaged community," which improves its eligibility for funding. Specifically, California law (SB 535) requires 25 percent of the proceeds from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to go to projects that benefit disadvantaged communities (CalEPA 2017). In 2016, National City was awarded a $9.2 million dollar grant for the Paradise Creek affordable housing project, an infill transit-oriented development that will add more than 200 affordable housing units to the Old Town area of National City.

National City continues to build on past lessons while working on issues at the intersection of environmental justice and planning. The Westside Specific Plan was a springboard for a comprehensive land use plan update. In collaboration with EHC, National City developed and adopted a Health and Environmental Justice Element as part of the city's general plan in 2012. The new element was the first adopted in California. In 2016, this local innovation was scaled up. The governor of California signed SB 1000, which requires cities and counties to develop an Environmental Justice element for future local general plans (Leyva 2016).

ReGenesis Project in Spartanburg, South Carolina

After years of disinvestment, the 1990s found the Arkwright and Forest Park neighborhoods in Spartanburg, South Carolina, struggling. Urban renewal efforts in the 1970s had decimated the community's formerly vibrant commercial core of 70 black-owned businesses. Economic revitalization initiatives for improving the downtown areas of Spartanburg had not reached these neighborhoods. The only road into the neighborhoods was frequently blocked by standing trains, isolating them from other areas of the city (Malpass 2013). Residential neighborhoods and industry existed side by side due to few zoning restrictions and land use controls in the 1970s, and the communities had two Superfund sites: a former fertilizer plant and a solid waste landfill.

In the late 1990s, Harold Mitchell began to link neighborhood health concerns to the pollution in his community. He took the initiative to interview residents, conduct research on abandoned and contaminated sites, and convene community meetings. Given the overwhelming set of challenges facing Arkwright and Forest Park, Mitchell created a community organization called ReGenesis in 1997, with a mission to represent neighborhood interests in cleaning up the contaminated sites and revitalizing the surrounding community.

Through ReGenesis, Mitchell focused on forming partnerships with the city, the county, the state environmental department, EPA, the local housing authority, and the University of South Carolina Upstate. Equally important, ReGenesis was successful in leveraging an initial grant of $20,000 from the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice into $270 million worth of community investment, including the construction of over 500 new affordable/workforce housing units, the establishment of six health care centers, the cleanup of contaminated properties, and the repurposing of the former landfill as a solar farm.

Harold Mitchell has been a force for change, and he continues to demonstrate how to address environmental justice during the planning and development process as a state representative. In 2015, the ReGenesis Project received the National Planning Excellence Award for Advancing Diversity and Social Change (in Honor of Paul Davidoff) (Figure 5).

Lessons Learned

Both of these projects are worthy of further study by researchers. Each project has lessons worth elevating for practitioners. Local leaders set clear expectations, leveraged partnerships, and were persistent. The efforts were community-driven and directed by clear commitments to ensuring impacted populations experienced material improvements in their quality of life. Finally, the projects were implemented with a great sense of respect

for local knowledge. Although there are hurdles to implementing equitable development, the compelling results achieved in these communities suggest the hurdles can be cleared.

Leveraging Points to Support Equitable Development

Encouraging equitable development is not hard. Instead, equitable development is an area of specialization that requires nurturing just like alternative dispute resolution, spatial analysis (GIS), or urban design.

Although tackling a new issue can be daunting, focusing on strategic leveraging points may make the task more manageable. In systems analysis, leveraging points are the places where small shifts can reverberate into big changes (Meadows 1999). Below are a few areas that planners can use as starting points.

Set Clear Expectations in Policies and Plans

In public policy, it is generally understood that desired outcomes do not materialize when goals are implicit and unclear. Public policies are implemented based on explicit provisions. The public sector needs to be intentional and offer clearer statements that social equity is central to encouraging a comprehensive solution, rather than treating it as subordinate to economic, transportation, land use, and environmental objectives.

When updates were made to the 2008 Comprehensive Plan for King County, Washington, provisions were included for equity and environmental justice. Local officials realized the county was not immune to national trends regarding social disparities tied to health and the environment. New provisions for equity and environmental justice were added in an attempt to promote predictability for tackling problems further upstream than was typically done (King County 2008). In the end, the best way to communicate values and priorities is by calling them out.

Bone Up on Environmental Justice

Enough cannot be said about environmental justice as a strategy professional planners can leverage for making a visible difference in communities. Sustainable community work is subject to operating in distinct silos, but planners and environmental justice experts navigate similar hurdles when attempting to improve quality of life for populations whose voices may be underrepresented in local policy decisions. Environmental justice proponents are well acquainted with the disappointments and implications when redevelopment projects "depart from the station" without an important group of passengers onboard (Lerner 1998).

Over the past two decades, environmental justice proponents have doubled down on developing or assisting with tools and programs that support community-driven solutions in impacted communities, including the National Community Involvement Conference, the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model, and the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Roadmap (U.S. EPA 2008a, 2008b) (Figure 6). The lessons from these programs are transferable, especially for professionals who work in fields of planning, architecture, and design. As planners strive to forge a healthier and prosperous future, it will be prudent to leverage the institutional knowledge and problem-solving focus of environmental justice experts (Eley 2016).

Figure 6. Training participants review copies of EPA's Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model report. Photo by Carlton Eley.

Use Discernment with Contractors

Planning departments often hire contractors to assist with projects. As equitable development gains traction, more consulting firms will reference it as part of their suite of services.

As clients, planning departments need to be shrewd when selecting a contractor for support. In advance, planning departments can do homework and inquire: What is the track record of the service provider? What are their results? What range of projects is in their equitable development portfolio? Are the results substantive or superficial? Is the service provider going to know as much or less about the topic compared with the client?

In some instances, a private consulting firm may not be the best option. Instead, it may be more appropriate for a planning department to work with a nongovernmental organization that offers equitable development support based on fee-for-service, such as The Center for Social Inclusion or PolicyLink.

Change How Projects Are Managed

The success of equitable development hinges on proponents who are willing to introduce communities to new alternatives for development. While the course of action may not be popular at first, persistence tends to pay off for the purpose of improving communities. Horizontal and inclusive leadership structures tend to encourage a culture of shared responsibility and offer staff greater opportunities to make strategic choices. In the ideal work environment, planning staff may work on equitable development without reservation because entrepreneurship is encouraged.

In a less ideal work environment, where equitable development may be perceived as risky or not consistent with the culture of the office, staff may find it far more effective to

Figure 7. Education is a lifelong process: plenary at PolicyLink's Equity Summit 2015 in Los Angeles, California. Photo by Carlton Eley.

make equitable development a requirement within their own projects rather than try to convince the workplace of the value added. Planners can build professional track records of encouraging equitable development by lecturing, writing, organizing conference sessions, building relationships with allied professionals, making it a requirement of grants or contracts that they manage, or addressing it through community technical assistance projects that they are assigned or opt to initiate.

Public policy is as much about priorities and values as it is about rules. Sometimes the best way to encourage an institution to be pliable on a position is to simply let project results speak for themselves. Successful outcomes are the best levers for overcoming risk aversion.

Counsel for Practitioners Seeking to Advance Equitable Development

The practice of planning is not based on a static model. The profession regularly adapts to new trends, opportunities, and challenges. By improving proficiency, practitioners can rise above "false choices" rather than acquiesce to business as usual. Here is additional guidance for planners to consider when encouraging equitable development.

Acknowledge Inconvenient Truths

In the past, regressive planning policies and development practices contributed to the untenable conditions in housing, land use, infrastructure, and sanitation that current practitioners are striving to correct. Mistakes can be wasteful, and serious blunders erode the public confidence that is the basis for effective government.

Injurious policies and practices have always been a zero-sum game. If planners are to maintain public trust, practitioners will need to be bold enough to understand, acknowledge, and avoid repeating gaffes rather than unintentionally defending them. Hard-hit communities have experienced a deficit of wealth; such places have not experienced a deficit in collective memory or feelings.

Planners can speak up and acknowledge inconvenient truths constructively. Although silence may be acceptable for expediency and efficiency, the approach does not solve difficult problems. Instead, it simply shifts the burden of responsibility. In the end, most citizens prefer hearing an uncomfortable truth rather than being pleasantly misled.

Remain Intellectually Curious and Challenge Generalizations

According to Randall Arendt, planners should "observe, record, communicate and self-educate" (Arendt 2011). Education is

Tools That Are Making a Difference

There has been much progress since PolicyLink coined the term equitable development in 1998. But movements for encouraging community parity are not sprints, they are marathons, and the public needs tools to get the job done.

One such tool is the U.S. EPA's Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model (U.S. EPA 2008a). The model is a valuable tool to help distressed communities and other stakeholders work together to address their environmental and public health issues in a constructive manner, and was created with evaluation and learning in mind to retain valuable institutional learning. Elements of the model are broadly applicable for alternative dispute resolution, visioning, or simply mapping how to work with diverse citizens during an extended public involvement process. There are several resources available to guide planners in using this tool; for example, "The Power of Partnerships" demonstrates practical application of the model in the context of a community development case example (U.S. EPA Office of Environmental Justice n.d).

Another useful tool is the process of social impact assessment (SIA) as included in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). SIA is predicated on the notion that decision makers should understand the consequences of their decisions before they act and that the people affected will not only be apprised of the effects, but have the opportunity to participate in designing their future. ***Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment in the USA*** was published in 2003 (IOCGP 2003). It is an update to guidelines initially released in 1994 by the Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment (IOCGP 1994).

Finally, PolicyLink's Equitable Development Toolkit offers 27 tools to help reverse patterns of segregation and disinvestment, prevent displacement, and promote equitable revitalization (PolicyLink n.d.). The tools are grouped within four issue areas: affordable housing, economic opportunity, healthy equity and place, and land use and environment.

a lifelong process. Often, practitioners need to compensate for deficits or gaps in academic training. Today, it is easier for planners to self-educate about equitable development. There are national summits and workshops that practitioners can attend (Figure 7, p. 7). Scholars are producing books and reports. The creation of the internet and the growing use of social media have made it easier to participate in webinars or review lectures from national leaders. Also, practitioners can request tours of successful projects.

Alternatively, there are instances when practitioners need to challenge baseless claims that are harmful to the profession. For example, one prevailing stereotype about underserved communities is that residents are "apathetic." This is an easy way to blame residents without examining other complexities that would reveal a more realistic assessment of a community (Hamilton 1992). Also, these claims are troubling because they fly in the face of community-driven activity led by citizens who are committed to being proactive and responsible rather than reactive and emotive. At a time plagued by tight schedules, attention deficits, and the limitations of personal bandwidth, proponents for equitable development have to be prepared to elevate the successful outcomes and solutions that need to be part of the collective dialogue for improving communities.

Understand That Race Still Matters

Robert Mier once described race as "the ubiquitous reality that must be acknowledged" (Mier 1994). In 2013, Dustin Cable's innovative "racial dot map" spatial analysis of cities using 2010 U.S. Census data made it difficult to be incredulous that racial segregation remains entrenched by neighborhood in many communities (Cable 2013). The distinct contrasts within the maps support the complementary research of Professor Olon Dotson at Ball State University on "Fourth World Theory," a methodology for examining and developing greater understanding of the extent of the distress and abandonment commonly found in American cities (Dotson 2014).

Although planners tend to tread lightly concerning the subject of race, perhaps practitioners can learn from the public health sector, where race is not a taboo subject. National experts like Dr. Camara Jones, president of the American Public Health Association, have explained the connections between race, social determinants, and the built environment in editorials and presentations (Minnesota Department of Health 2014). Through such work, public health professionals have transcended the apprehension that race can be a politically charged topic, and they have learned how to discuss such subjects in an effective manner (ICMA 2016).

In the end, lack of sensitivity to cultural awareness diminishes public policy, including planning policy. Failing to acknowledge the realities of race in the context of public policy can stifle both the skills development of public servants and the service delivery of public organizations (Grooms 2015).

Be Bold and Take Risks

In his final "state of the city" address as mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, Emanuel Cleaver II advised his successor, "Don't be afraid to make mistakes. If you let your fear of failure overcome your desire to succeed, you won't do anything" (Cleaver 1999).

Encouraging equitable development requires working outside of established comfort zones, and putting sustainability within reach of underserved communities is audacious work. Although the experience may have its highs and lows, the reward from trailblazing is found in the journey as well as the outcome. Occasionally, the work may disturb complacent conditions that are otherwise seen as satisfactory. Still, planners have a professional responsibility to get into "good trouble" or "necessary trouble" when they see something is not fair, not right, or not just, as aptly framed by Congressman John Lewis (Gonzalez 2016).

Good trouble does not mean planners need to get arrested as Congressman Lewis did in the 1960s. Instead, planners are encouraged to go above and beyond what is required and to do their jobs so well that they have a clear conscious at the end of the day.

Planners can educate their peers about equitable development by hosting a monthly lecture series or webinar series, insist new development projects with a residential component exceed the industry average of 20 percent affordable housing, balance the goals of cultural development and economic development, offer pro bono community advisory service assistance to a vulnerable neighborhood before development pressures build up, serve as a municipal partner for a local nonprofit that aspires to apply for an Environmental Justice Small Grant (U.S. EPA n.d.a), introduce equitable development as a breakout discussion during facilitated meetings with neighborhood leaders, and the like. Rather than "design like you give a damn" (Architecture for Humanity 2006), planners are charged to "plan like you give a damn."

Conclusion

Within the past 25 years, the planning profession has strived to manage its public image. Multiple researchers have documented the indirect impact that distrust of government has had on the profession (Sanyal 2000; Collins and Harris 1993). In June 2012, the American Planning Association was pleased to announce a shift in public opinion. The results of a poll revealed "two-thirds of Americans believe their community needs more planning to promote economic recovery" (APA 2012). This is a great shift from the 1990s, and it needs to be celebrated. However, maintaining public confidence will require the planning profession to not rest on its laurels and to be pliable.

The Center for American Progress reported in 2007 that 37 million Americans were living below the official poverty line (Greenburg et al. 2007). At the micro level, persistent poverty translates into lost potential for children or lower productivity and earnings for adults. At the macro level, persistent poverty can impair the nation's ability to remain competitive in a world of increasing global competition. Because having approximately 12 percent of the nation's population living below the poverty level can impose enormous costs on society, it is all the more critical for practitioners to be acutely sensitive to the

relevance of social equity rather than passively treating it as inconsequential during the planning and development process.

Planning in the U.S. has matured beyond its humble origins in social work as well as movements for municipal and housing reform. Members of the profession strive to create well-planned, physical environments and orderly places that allow people to live free (Thomas and Ritzdorf 1999). However, planners do themselves a disservice if they forget "it is a basic principle of fairness that the burden of policies that are necessary for society—like protecting the environment—should not be borne by a small minority who happen to be victimized by their side effects" (Smith 2011).

Equitable development can help planners to focus on their "true north." Equitable development is not distinct from or competitive with sustainability. Instead, equitable development is essential to encouraging outcomes that are sustainable.

About the Author

Carlton Eley is an urban planner, sociologist, and civil servant. Possessing an appreciation for environmental justice and sustainable urban policy, he has become an accomplished expert on the topic of equitable development in the public sector. Eley regularly organizes continuing education content for audiences around the country through lectures, workshops, panels, and webinars. He has published multiple articles as well as blogs on the topic of equitable development. Eley holds an MSURP from the University of Iowa.

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