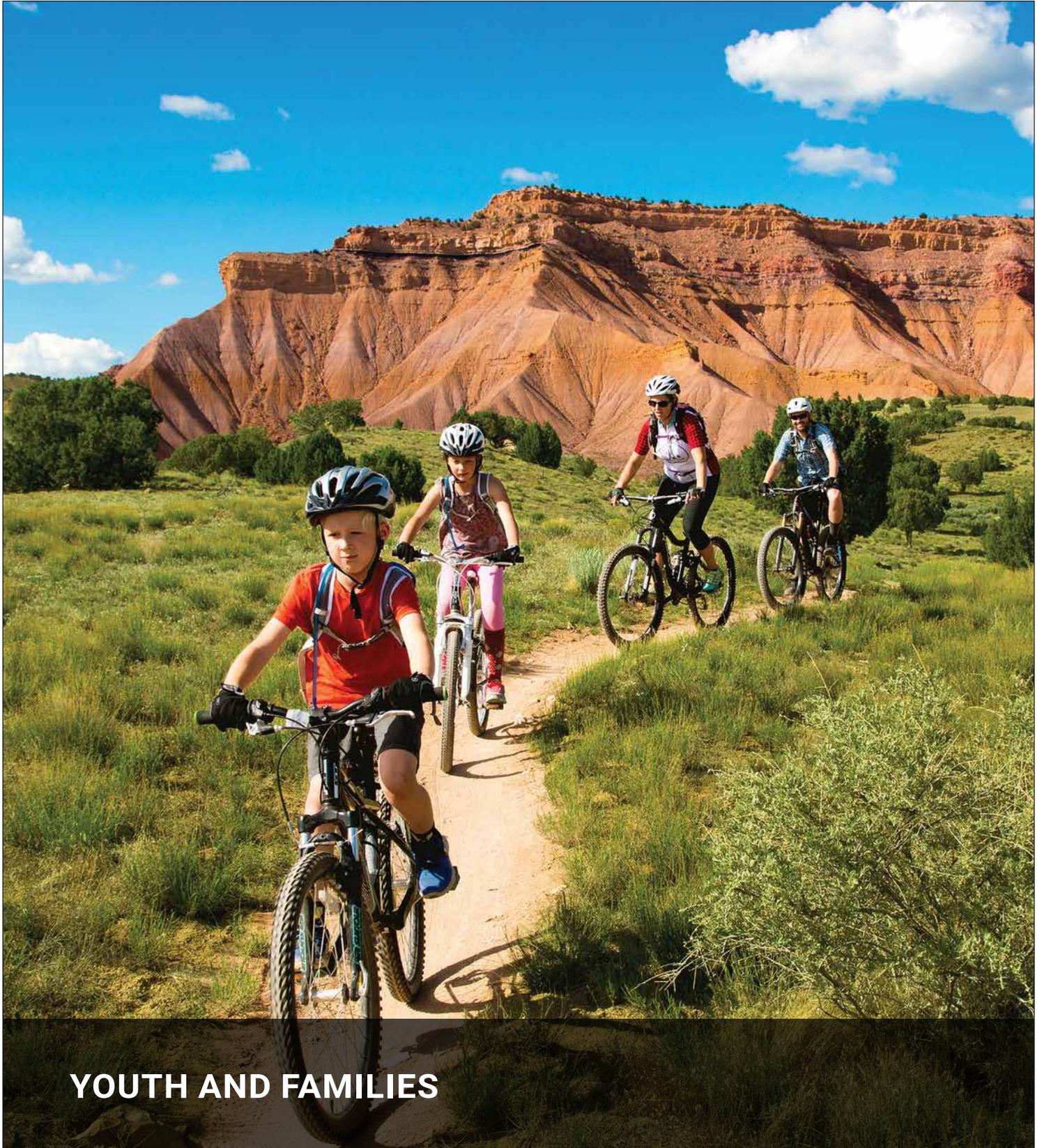


Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 95, No. 4, August 2019



YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Planning Family-Friendly Communities

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What is city planning, and how does it impact me? How does it impact my family? These aren't the questions most people regularly ask themselves. In fact, many citizens do not think about the role planners play in creating family-friendly places, sustainable cities, or exciting destinations. However, on a day-to-day basis, the chance that a planner in your community is actively thinking about those topics is high.

Planners can do many things. Some things they do are think about how much park space is available, examine whether people can safely walk to get to a grocery store, consider how many

lanes a road should have, engage with communities, and study housing and demographic data. It is not a job most kids think about doing when they grow up, but city planning is a crucial profession for empowering and uniting individuals and places, as it is planning that is the connective tissue that binds all the elements of a city together. Ultimately, the goal of planning is to create places that maximize the safety, welfare, and well-being of all residents in a community.

In order to do this, planners tend to think of cities and towns like puzzles. Planners examine how to fit parks, roads, factories, and houses together

in a way that makes sense and includes all the individuals and families in the community. Part of the puzzle is thinking about people while also managing wildly changing contextual landscapes. Colorado is facing many changes in development and growth, especially in its metro areas, and other isolated rural areas are also being impacted by a rapidly changing future. No matter which type of community you live in, the planners in your region possess a unique skill set to help elected officials create and sustain great places.

In light of a rapidly changing future, planners must be problem solvers.



Planners are not trained do just solving the problems you may have today with a specific building permit, but problems they foresee happening in the future. Planners work together with officials to solve the giant puzzle that is city and town planning so that someone is always thinking of how to prepare the city for the residents of the future. Planners also think about sudden events that could impact a community, like wildfires, and what the community can start doing now to minimize the damage in the future and to be more resilient.

If this was not enough to think about on a daily basis, planners also have a responsibility to the communities they work in to engage the whole community in order to create these great places. This means engaging underserved populations like rural communities, youth, minorities, people of color, and other often underrepresented groups. The American Planning Association Colorado (APA CO) Chapter, which is an association of more than 1,500 planners who tackle similar challenges every day, has taken

a very active role in providing education and support on a variety of topics, including community engagement. In 2016, a Youth in Planning Committee was formed by APA CO to focus on engaging young people in conversations around the importance of creating successful communities for all.

Three years later, this committee, composed of members from all over the state of Colorado, is still focused on ways to communicate the importance of effectively engaging youth to help solve complex

community issues and help others understand how young people's voices can be incorporated to create family-friendly places.

The committee is currently developing a curriculum that meets the state's educational standards that can be taken into classrooms (K–12) by planners to educate young people about planning and the impact it has on their cities, towns, and state. By meaningfully engaging and educating youth, the committee is preparing them to be empowered citizens who care about city planning. The Youth in Planning Committee is also launching a Youth Planning Summit program that will be available to communities around Colorado. These summits will focus on connecting youth with the planning challenges in their community and challenging them to identify solutions.

This is just the start, though. In fact, many family-friendly communities that value youth engagement can be found all over Colorado. These communities are organizing events that include everything from one-day educational events like Voices on Canvas' Annual Lego Challenge, "Building Community Block by Block," where youth and their families work in teams to construct a community vision of an ideal place to live, work, and play, to a more complete program like Box City that covers the nexus of urban design, historic preservation, and city planning by combining art and planning through a hands-on activity of building a city out of cardboard.

Other communities, including the City of Pueblo, are encouraging youth to be involved in the actual planning process of creating family-friendly communities. In 2018, "Inspiring Pueblo's Youth as Future Stewards of

the Great Outdoors" won the APA Colorado Community Engagement Merit Award. The City of Pueblo was selected to participate in the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Inspire Initiative, which is aimed at inspiring youth in Colorado to appreciate, enjoy, and steward the great outdoors. The goal of this project was twofold: to have youth proactively participate in it and to encourage youth to experience the outdoors, starting with their own backyard, in a progressive steps program.

Another project that enabled youth to be involved in the often-convoluted planning process was the City of Lakewood's Sustainability Plan, which offered a class at a local middle school to help bring the ideas, perspectives, and passions of students and teachers to the table. This class offered a realistic, applicable project that helped transform students' ideas into reality and truly made the idea of sustainability accessible for kids of all ages. The class participated in field trips, helped to write chapters of the plan, illustrated portions of the plan, and provided action steps for what kids could do to help further the goals of the plan. The end result was a plan written by kids, for kids.

Colorado is not alone. Youth engagement is in full force in many communities. For example, Y-PLAN, sponsored by the Center for Cities + Schools at the University of California Berkeley, is a program that encourages youth to become change agents in their community by integrating city planning into classes as diverse as government and physics. Another, Future Leaders in Planning, is a leadership development program based out of the Chicago Metropolitan

Agency for Planning. The program started as an avenue for youth to give input at the regional planning level while the agency was working on a long-range plan for the greater Chicago region. The goal of the program is to expose students to a range of issues, including transportation, land use, housing, and economic development. Even international organizations like Youthful Cities, UNESCO, and UN-Habitat are designing programs and toolkits in partnership with planners to help understand what youth want to see in their cities and how youth can be change agents in their community.

Youth engagement is a crucial part of creating family-friendly communities that are future thinking and inclusive. Planners have recognized this and are always trying innovative ways to engage youth, because the youth of today are the future of tomorrow.

Young people are a large part of the population, and they have a substantial stake in contributing to the building of strong communities. Although they may not have a planner's lexicon or experience, they recognize the impacts of planning on their lives. Beyond that, youth are passionate and can provide a previously unheard perspective while advocating for deeper community engagement.

City planners are tasked with working with young people in order to create family-friendly communities that reflect the hopes and goals for the places youth want to live, work, and socialize in 20 years from now. And, by tapping in and listening to this voice, communities can successfully plan for families, including inclusive all-ages spaces that are accessible, safe, and fun.

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