

WASHINGTON APA'S GAME CHANGING INITIATIVE
FOSTER SOCIAL EQUITY WORKING GROUP

Learn More: Social Equity



Social Equity Challenges

In his December 4, 2013 speech, President Obama cited income inequality as a defining challenge of our time, noting that:

“in the United States, a child born into the bottom 20 percent of income levels has less than a 5 percent chance of making it to the top income levels and is 10 times likelier to stay where he is — worse than other industrial countries such as Canada, Germany and France.” (web access at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/obama-speech-focus-income-disparities-21090929>)

Planners aim to spur economic development, improve ecological conditions, and create places enjoyable for living, working, learning, and playing. However, these positive actions can also have unintended consequences on under-represented, minority, and lower income groups. Displacement of residents and small businesses is an unintended consequence that often comes alongside growth and improvement. Longtime residents and businesses are no longer able to afford to stay in their neighborhood, causing them to move further from social networks and their workplace or clientele, and resulting in a greater burden on transportation infrastructure.

Alongside the displacement issue, providing affordable housing is a challenge for many Washington communities. Not only is it difficult because it lacks the profit motivation of other types of development, but it also is politically challenging due to the fear of dis-incentivizing development.

Another challenge facing planners is that planned improvements are not all equal—some benefit existing groups more than others. Traditional metrics and public processes do not necessarily reflect community priorities, interests, and needs. Planning processes are often short-lived in comparison to the time it takes to build relationships with community members. In traditional planning processes, people may not engage at all, and when they do participate, they may feel they are not heard. “Meaningful engagement” gives planners the information they need about community members’ interests and needs.

Actions to Address Social Equity

The Social Equity Working Group is gathering and building tools to help planners thoroughly think through the repercussions of public investment, prioritize improvements truly needed and desired by local communities, and maintain affordability for residents and businesses. The Group has developed: a social equity university research package, an affordable housing resources list, strategies to better incorporate meaningful public engagement and social equity in awards criteria, and a mobile workshop focusing on affordable commercial space and housing around light rail stations.

Contact: Rachel Miller, MAKERS architecture and urban design, LLP
rachelm@makersarch.com

Participants:

- Kurt Creager
- Maria Cullooyah
- Sophie Glass
- Sandy Howard
- Monica Joe
- Ken Katahira
- Dawn Meader McCausland
- Anna Nelson
- Gwen Rousseau
- Michael Stanger
- Jiarui Tao
- Michael Zelinski