



Presenters at APA California Diversity Summit (L/R) Yolanda Moses, PhD; Dan Amsden, AICP; Chris Lango and Katie Valenzuela Garcia

This and That: Reflections from the 2017 American Planning Association California Chapter Conference

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Sixteen years ago, I attended my first [APA California Chapter Conference](#) in the city of Sacramento. I had just completed my BA in Urban Studies and Planning from Cal State Northridge. I was there to present my student paper focused on the evolution of the City of Los Angeles examined through the city planning lens.

Last week, I returned to California's capital to once again attend this year's [conference](#). This time around, I was quite busy doing all kinds of things including speaking at two sessions, giving a presentation to the APA California Board of Directors, participating in a Soapbox session, attending panel discussions, meeting old and new friends and examining our work as planners through the lens of public health. Here are some highlights I'd like to share:

Diversity Summit



planners can better support vulnerable communities from displacement due to political, economic or social forces. It included a review of Sacramento's urban renewal history and how it has resulted in changing neighborhoods and culture throughout the city during the past six decades. The focus was on recent successes and continued challenges from urban renewal and how the City was able to become Time Magazine's most "inclusive large city" in the early 2000s. Ultimately, the goal was to have a robust discussion on lessons learned and what issues and challenges planners need to consider during their daily work. The panel included Dan Amsden, AICP, Director of Sacramento Operations at MIG Inc.; Chris Lango, a filmmaker; Yolanda Moses, PhD, Professor of Anthropology, Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Excellence, and Executive Director for Conflict Resolution at the University of California, Riverside; and Katie Valenzuela Garcia who is Principal Consultant, Joint Legislative Committee on Climate Change Policies as speakers.

One important resource shared during the summit was a short [film](#) on the history of redevelopment in the City of Sacramento. The documentary depicts Sacramento's success as a national model for re-configuring the built environment in downtowns across America through financial schemes that included a minuscule, or not at all, concern for the displacement of people of color, minorities and the poor.

California Planners4Health Initiative

For the past few months, I have been involved with the California [Planners4Health](#) Initiative along with a group of other dedicated volunteers and our project manager Linda Khamoushian. As part of completing the initial phase of this exciting initiative, I presented a proposed strategic plan to the APA California Board of Directors. This document is intended to ensure that California planners have the tools, are well informed and connected to continue to advance the healthy communities movement at the local and state levels. The presentation was well-received and the topic will be revisited for consideration during the Board's annual retreat once the grant's final report is completed.

Story Telling for Planners

My friend James Castaneda invited me to be on a panel he had been wanting to assemble for a long time in which planners could share examples of how story telling approaches could be used in planning processes. During the session, I was given the opportunity to share a [photovoice](#) created by high school students from the eastern Coachella Valley as part of the [Land Use Planning Awareness](#) (LUPA) project we have developed at the Department of Public Health in Riverside County. My other friend James Rojas who was also part of the panel shared how his [Place It!](#) method can be used as a story telling strategy. He also secured participation of John Moody, Creative Director at Invisible Cities Studio who shares excerpts of his short films including one from [LA](#) in which people's stories are intertwined with the built environment. I also got



[FRANCISCO URBAN FILM FESTIVAL](#) whose work is inspiring others to use film and story telling as community engagement strategies.



Planning for Diversity with Public Health Alliances

This session offered an opportunity for attendees to learn highlights from a series of regional convenings of planners and public health leaders from Northern, Central and Southern California. The case stories showcased effective collaboration tools, and innovative strategies including [Plan4Health](#) and [Planners4Health](#) to engage diverse stakeholders to create healthy and equitable communities. The session was moderated by one of my favorite public health figures Mary Anne Morgan who is the Director at the California Chronic Disease Prevention Leadership Project. Speakers included Amy Pendergast, Public Health Program & Policy Analyst at Shasta County Health & Human Services Agency - Public Health; Krista Hanni, PhD, Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Manager at Monterey County Health Department; Kirin Kumar, Executive Director at Walk Sacramento and myself.

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Mental Health and Community Planning

I would venture to say that this session, led by a rising planning star Della Acosta, was the first of its kind. Perhaps other planners have presented on the subject of mental health and planning, but certainly the topic is not at the top of the list of traditional planning practices. I will say that this was one of my all-time favorites. The session organizers presented an interactive approach designed to immerse the





due to depression, abandonment, homelessness, etc. Participants were divided into groups and each group embodied a fictional persona or avatar who was experiencing mental health distress.

The teams used tokens representing units of energy the avatars had to use when making various choices throughout the day. The choices had to do with planning issues related to the built environment such as proximity between destinations such as a clinic and home, cost of parking, efficient and affordable public transportation and many more. The point of the exercise was to immerse the audience into feeling the hardships some people experience when facing stressful and debilitating circumstances exacerbated by poor community planning. The ultimate goal of the exercise was to develop EMPATHY for those who experience mental health conditions.

*I think the development of a sense of empathy
for communities in distress should be one of
APA California's top priorities*

Here is the actual session's abstract:

We know good planning can improve our physical health, but what about our mental health? Experience how the environment affects overall wellbeing and poses challenges for mental health, and find solutions through an interactive process led by a team from the planning, medical, psychiatric, and service care fields. Moderator Della Acosta, Planner, Michael Baker International Speakers Angie Hood-Medland, MD, Chief Resident, University of California Davis Medical Center; Shannon Suo, MD, Clinical Psychiatrist, Sacramento County Mental Health Treatment Center; Al Rowlett, CEO, Turning Point Community Programs; Rachel Ford, Consumer Affairs Liaison, Solano County Behavioral Health

Environmental Justice and the General Plan: Advocacy and Implementation of SB1000

This session was organized by my colleagues at the [California Planning Roundtable](#) to offer perspectives of how cities across the state will comply with [SB1000](#). A component of particular importance was the announcement that a SB1000 Implementation [Toolkit](#) is about to be released. Here is the abstract and the speakers who participated in the session.

SB 1000 increases requirements for addressing environmental justice in the General Plan. This panel brings together organizations and individuals that advocated for SB 1000. Panelists will offer perspectives on how the provisions of the bill can be implemented in California communities. Hear about the hopes and challenges for implementing SB 1000, what successful implementation would look like, and how to



KUDIN, PhD, vice president for research, PolicyLINK Speakers Many Eng, Green Zones Program Manager, California Environmental Justice Alliance; Jonathan London, PhD, Associate Professor, Community and Human Development, University of California Davis, Faculty Director, Center for Regional Change, University of California Davis; Katie Valenzuela Garcia, Principal Consultant, Joint Legislative Committee on Climate Change Policies; David Early, AICP, LEED AP, Senior Advisor, PlaceWorks

Soapbox

This year, the conference included an opportunity for any planner to speak on any topic they wished to address in five minutes. This was a unique and fun way to engage informally during the conference. I was there when it started as I had signed up to speak. The first person who had put his/her name down did not show up, so I convinced my friend Edson



Ibanez from the City of Asuza to volunteer. He did not hesitate for a second. He tackled the topic the planner who didn't show up was supposed to talk about: walkability. Other brave souls included Eri Suzuki and Gunneet Anand from SiteLab, a planner from Caltrans and myself. I prepared remarks to address my thoughts on affordable housing like creating experimental overlay zones where new housing types could be built and creating multi-disciplinary teams to explore construction of non-traditional housing models affordable at various income brackets. At my friend Matt Burris' suggestion, I did my talk in Spanish just for fun. Because not everyone understood all I said, I went ahead and did it again in English.

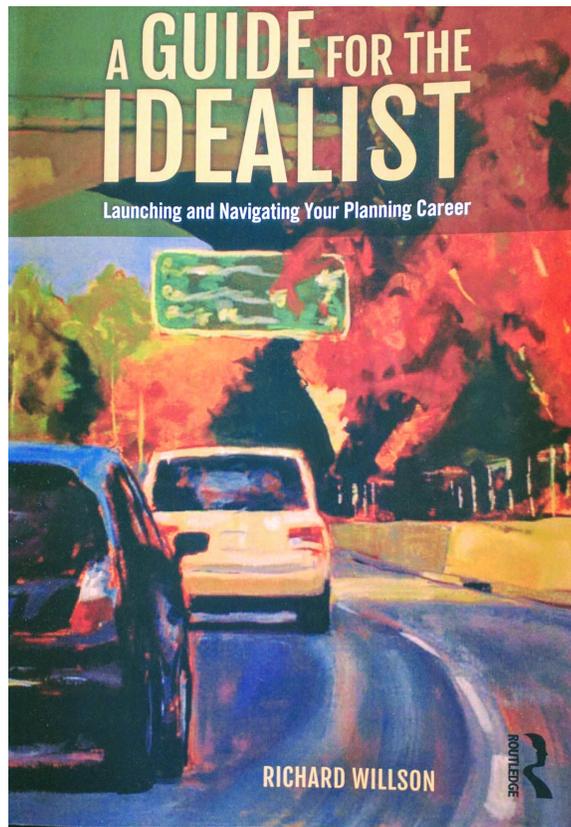
A Guide for the Idealist

As I was walking down the exhibitors booths, I ran into a giant in the planning field: Rick Willson who teaches at Cal Poly Pomona. He showed me a copy of his most recent book "[A Guide for the Idealist](#)." He searched for page 99 and boom! there was the short write up about my planning journey I contributed for one of his chapters. I am thankful for the opportunity he gave me to share a piece of my own story as a planner. This is a book that in my opinion is ground-braking. It is designed to help any planner make career choices a bit easier.

In conclusion, this year's APA California Conference "Capitalizing on Diversity" was one of the best ones I have ever attended. The theme of the conference and its content



planners continue to lead our profession and practice towards the development of a more equitable, healthier and thriving communities. This write up is how I'm starting to celebrate [National Community Planning Month!](#)



National Community Planning Month



October 2017

#PlanningMonth



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Leila Carver
Associate Planner

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Awesome write up, [Miguel Angel Vazquez, AICP!](#)

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