2026 Excellence in Planning Award Winners

By: Chris Pasinetti, AICP

The 2026 Excellence in Planning Awards were announced during the American Planning Association – Washington Chapter (APA-WA) annual conference in Vancouver on Thursday, October 8th. There are seven categories of awards: 1) Students, 2) Implementation, 3) Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations – Large Cities and Counties (city pop. > 40,000, county pop. > 60,000), 4) Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations – Small Cities and Counties, 5) Transportation Plans, 6) Community Involvement and 7) Sustainability.

However, there are not always winners in every category, every year. In addition, sometimes an applicant submits in one category, but the jury determines that that entry is a better fit in another category.

This year there were fifteen (15) submittals in various categories. Consequently, this year the jury chose six winners in the following six categories:

- **Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations—Large Cities and Counties**
- **Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations—Small Cities and Counties.**
- **Transportation Plan**
- **Community Involvement**
- **Sustainability**
- **Implementation**

The winner in the Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations – Large Cities and Counties category was the City of Vancouver, for Our Vancouver. T*he City directly engaged more than 2,000 people through more than 200 meetings, events, workshops, and outreach activities, receiving more than 2,000 ideas, comments, and inputs that shaped both the Comprehensive Plan and zoning code update. The plan routed in Equity, Housing, Zoning and Efficient Land Use, Zoning Code Overhaul and Equitable Engagement.*

The winner in the Comprehensive Planning/Development Regulations – Small Cities and Counties category was the City of Port Townsend, *for their* 2025 Comprehensive Plan. *The 2045 Vision describes a future that is "healthy, affordable and caring" and values "multi-generational neighborhoods of differing income levels and life experiences." Community engagement expressed design for housing for young families, aging-in-place opportunities for seniors, housing choice for workers, equitable access to opportunity, climate resilience, walkable neighborhoods, and more.*

The winner in the Transportation Plan category was the City of Spokane, *for the* *City of Spokane* - The Division Street Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan. *The Division Street Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan reimagines Spokane's primary commercial*

corridor as a series of connected, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods centered around high-capacity transit. Anchored by Spokane Transit Authority's City Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) investment and developed through a partnership between the City of Spokane, Spokane County, and Spokane Transit Authority, the plan demonstrates how comprehensive planning, urban design, and implementation programming can work together to shape the future of regional growth.

Spanning approximately nine miles and eleven station areas, the plan establishes a coordinated vision for one of Eastern Washington's most important transportation corridors. Rather than treating transit-oriented development as simply a land use exercise, the project integrates transportation, housing, economic development, placemaking, infrastructure, and community priorities into an actionable roadmap for corridor transformation.

The winner in the Community Involvement category was City of Bellevue - City of Bellevue Affordable Housing Strategy. *A short-term action plan that identifies city-led efforts to meet the housing needs of people at all income levels and life stages. Strategy focuses on near-term actions to meet housing needs. It prioritizes high-impact strategies focused on what we can do right now – preserve existing affordable housing, reduce the time and cost to build new homes, and explore new ways to support deeply affordable housing in Bellevue.*

The winner in the Sustainability Category was Kitsap County for the Kitsap County Sea Level Rise Vulnerability and Risk Assessment. *County leaders recognized that planning for these future conditions required more than broad regional projections. Decision-makers, residents, and partner agencies needed locally relevant information that could identify where risks are likely to occur, what assets may be affected, and how those vulnerabilities could change over time. Existing information often presented climate impacts in technical terms that were difficult to translate into day-to-day planning and investment decisions. Kitsap County's challenge was to develop a scientifically credible understanding of future sea level rise impacts and translate that information into practical guidance for the people responsible for planning, investing, and preparing for future change.*

The winner in the **Implementation** Category was the **City of Tukwila** for City of Tukwila - Middle Housing Code Visualization Tools. *In 2025 Tukwila adopted a new middle housing zoning category called Community Residential CR) that incorporated the former low density and medium density residential zones. The zoning tool allows the user to select a lot area, lot depth, lot width and configuration such as corner lot and alley access. In response the tool will create a visualization of the setbacks, development coverage, and building footprint as well as returning the maximum allowed housing units and required parking for different housing types.*

The 2027 Excellence in Planning Awards will be given out at the Planning Association of Washington (PAW) Annual Conference in Chelan, April 21st to 23rd, 2027. Details will be out soon on submittal instructions and deadlines, per PAW Awards Committee Chairperson Chris Pasinetti, AICP.

Congratulations to all of the above award recipients – your excellent work is an inspiration to all of us!