

RESEARCH YOU CAN USE

A Bonanza of Journal Articles

Impact factors are the most common measures of importance for science and social science journals. They are computed by adding up the number of citations to articles in a particular journal for the last two years and dividing by the number of articles. Journal editors and contributors take great pride in these numbers—and in the rankings of their publications relative to other journals in the same field.

Under the stewardship of editor David Sawicki, FAICP, of Georgia Tech and managing editor Amy Helling, AICP, the *Journal of the American Planning Association* has seen its impact factor rise from 0.91 to 2.25, making it the first among 32 journals in the field of urban studies and second among 43 journals in the planning and development category.

This has made my job easier. In the early days of this column (which began in 2006), it was sometimes a struggle to find an article that I thought would be of interest to planning practitioners. Now my cup runneth over. For this column, I had to choose between one great article in the January 2010 issue of the *Journal of Planning Literature* and four great articles in the Spring 2010 issue of *JAPA*. My comments on the *JPL* article, on health impact assessment, will have to wait until the next column in this series. The four *JAPA* articles—it was impossible to choose one—will be briefly summarized in this space. Each of them will be of interest to different groups.

An article by Paul Lewis and Mark Baldassare, “The Complexity of Public Attitudes toward Compact Development: Survey Evidence from Five States,” reinforces a finding of an earlier JAPA article (featured in my December 2007 column). That article indicated that roughly half of all Americans are now receptive to living in compact, mixed use neighborhoods. This latest article goes a step further, examining public attitudes toward four aspects of compact development. It turns out that,

when asked to make tradeoffs between compact places and sprawling places, survey respondents were more receptive to mixed use than to high density. That’s a useful insight both for developers and for those who review their plans.

In “Community Benefits Agreements and Local Government: A Review of Recent Evidence,” Laura Wolf-Powers studied all of the 27 community benefit agreements in place in the U.S. as of 2009 and examined four in detail. CBAs are a new form of public-private development agreement that commits developers to certain material improvements in return for political support

become a mainstream activity for departments of transportation in the U.S., with hundreds of programs now in existence. But the intense traffic calming embodied in a woonerf has yet to be attempted here. This represents an opportunity for innovative developers.

My favorite of the four *JAPA* articles, because it is so nuanced, is Noreen McDonald’s “School Siting: Contested Visions of the Community School.” Through in-depth interviews with planners from five counties in Maryland and five in northern Virginia, McDonald discovers that different groups have very different definitions



From *Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting*, by R. Ewing and W. Green (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2003)

East High School in Gainesville, Florida, an example of a community school that no one is likely to walk to.

from neighboring residents. Developers may agree to provide affordable units, supply open space or community facilities, award construction contracts to minority-owned firms, or select commercial tenants likely to hire local employees. I must admit that, before reading this article, I was unfamiliar with CBAs. I now know that they grease the wheels of development, making it more likely that public approvals and subsidies will flow smoothly.

A third *JAPA* article is by Mike Bidulph. “Evaluating the English Home Zone Initiatives” reviews comparative data from 14 intense traffic-calming projects (modeled after the Dutch *woonerf*, a street designed for walking speeds). In most projects, a street has been made more attractive, traffic has been slowed down, and traffic safety has been maintained or improved. As APA’s *U.S. Traffic Calming Manual* points out, traffic calming has

of “community school.” Smart growth proponents advocate small schools that are intimately linked to neighborhoods so students can walk to school, while facility planners favor large schools that will meet the recreational and civic needs of the broader community. She recommends that individual communities consider the tradeoffs associated with different school sizes and make choices that balance these competing objectives.

With articles like these, Sawicki and Helling have much to be proud of. They will be a hard act to follow when they step down as editors of *JAPA* later this year.

Reid Ewing

Ewing is a professor of city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah and an associate editor of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. He is also the lead author of the APA Planners Press book, *U.S. Traffic Calming Manual*. Past columns are available at http://cmpweb.arch.utah.edu/research_projects/research-you-can-use.