



American Planning Association Planner's Advocacy Week Talking Points

Use these ideas below as a guide for framing your comments and argument. As you think about tailoring your message, consider which issues are most important to you or have the biggest impact on your community. Although a detailed list of tips for effective advocacy meetings is enclosed in your Planner's Advocacy Week packet, here are a few key things to keep in mind:

1. Prepare in advance. Think about what you plan to communicate during the meeting.
2. Provide a local context. When you are discussing policies and programs, provide local examples. One of the most effective tools in galvanizing support from your representative is the ability of local advocates like you to point to specific projects and their impact.
3. Make a specific request. Use the suggestions below to make a specific "ask" during your meeting.

If you need additional information, contact the government affairs staff at 202-872-0611 or govtaffairs@planning.org.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The social, economic and physical damages sustained by New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are vivid and compelling reminders about the need for, and value of, comprehensive plans that address natural and human-caused disasters. Through land use planning, communities can minimize their risks to both natural and human-caused disasters, thereby creating places of lasting value and that afford residents greater choices about how and where they work and live.

We cannot afford to ignore the lessons Hurricane Katrina has taught. Ignoring the potential for risk is dangerous for our communities. Now is the time to assess community vulnerabilities to manmade and natural hazards and simultaneously implement disaster mitigation plans to reduce those risks while rebuilding. Let's put the planning tools available to good use to build solid foundations for these communities. Effective disaster prevention, response and mitigation measures can occur only with adequate and effective investment in infrastructure for all our communities.

It is clear that now is no time for a "business as usual" approach from government. APA is pleased to support the "Safe Communities Act of 2005" (H.R. 3524) that was introduced in July by U.S. Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) and Curt Weldon (R-Pa.). The bill authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security to make grants to encourage community safety by incorporating disaster mitigation and emergency preparedness into comprehensive plans or land use planning statutes.

In March, APA adopted a "Policy Guide on Security" that highlights the need for comprehensive planning in hazard mitigation policies at the federal, state and local levels. The policy guide has been an effective tool in advancing APA's agenda for safe growth, and has acted as a resource to lawmakers who work to improve disaster mitigation laws throughout the country.

In October, APA Executive Director Paul Farmer, AICP, testified at a joint hearing in the House of Representatives on behalf of planners and the need for long-term comprehensive planning in post-disaster recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast region. He also advocated the necessity of pre-disaster planning and lauded the Safe Communities Act, which he said "goes a long way in addressing the need for disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies through grants to local planning authorities."

In early November, the House Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing to address various legislative proposals in response to Hurricane Katrina. H.R. 3524 was one of the bills under consideration, and Rep. Blumenauer testified in support of his bill. Blumenauer noted that "the devastation caused by Katrina provides an opportunity to not just help people recover, but make sure they are better off." He went on to say that "the grants authorized by the Safe Communities Act will provide communities the federal tools to plan in a safe and sustainable manner."

Specifically, H.R. 3524 would create a new grant program to support state, local and regional planning activities aimed at reducing threats posed by natural and human-caused disasters. Grant-eligible projects include comprehensive risk assessment and inventory of critical infrastructure, land use planning for natural hazards and terrorism security, updating of building codes and urban design techniques for risk-reduction.

H.R. 3524 helps boost communities' planning capacity by authorizing a \$57.25 million per year, 5-year grant program that would help states and local governments to modernize outdated planning statutes, many of which go back to the 1920s; create or revise local comprehensive plans to include risk-reduction and mitigation measures for both natural and human caused hazards; and develop or revise multi-state regional plans or plan elements.

GENERAL & INTRODUCTORY POINTS

Good planning provides:

- **More efficient investment of scarce public resources**

The planning process ensures that investments are made in a thoughtful, coordinated fashion. It serves to maximize connections among housing, transportation, economic development, and open space. Studies have consistently demonstrated that areas with strong, coordinated planning receive a higher return on infrastructure investments.

- **Increased choice for citizens and enhanced quality of life**

Planning is a means of empowering citizens to devise and realize a common vision that meets broad needs and promotes a positive future. New planning innovations can help communities improve access and choice for where to work and live. Innovative planning processes, such as the award-winning Envision Utah program, that integrate new technologies and expand public participation provide citizens with an array of housing, transportation and investment options. Good planning is about offering citizens choices that make sense. Providing equally efficient alternatives creates genuine market forces that lead to improvements in overall mobility, efficiency and livability.

- **Reduced level of risk to future damages**

Recovery and reconstruction in the wake of a natural or other calamity presents a unique opportunity to reduce the level of risk to future damages — provided hazard mitigation strategies and elements are adopted when a community is rebuilt. Investment in prevention will save both lives and money.

Planning is vital to effective emergency preparedness and disaster mitigation.

Planners are vital resources to devastated communities to help assess risk, rebuild safely, and reduce vulnerability to man-made or natural disasters. Planning decisions are among the most essential local government responsibilities. Planning affects the lives of every citizen in a community. Planners help communities see the big picture and take a long-term approach to guiding growth and change. Communities cannot afford to forgo good planning in a rush to build or rebuild. Now is the time to consider all of the planning questions to ensure communities of lasting value.

Hazard mitigation is a top legislative concern of the nation's planners.

APA supports legislation that improves planning related to security and safety. Federal investment in natural disasters should include prevention and mitigation, as well as response and recovery. Smart planning can redirect development away from hazardous areas and protect lives and property from future disasters.

- **Federal policy has a dramatic influence on community development and subsequent quality of life.**

The need for communities to plan and address safety issues has never been greater. The average number of federal emergency disasters declared each year has risen from 23 (between 1980 and 1984) to 53 (between 2000 and 2004). Further, more people are choosing to live in fire-prone areas than ever before.

Federal dollars for hazard mitigation guide thousands of local growth and development decisions ranging from land conservation to siting major regional facilities. Safe growth plays a dominant role in shaping the character of our nation and each of its communities.

- **Planning for a disaster resistant community can help save lives and money. Pre-disaster mitigation plans are fiscally responsible.**

Land use and public facility planning at the state and local levels have not had adequate financial resources to fully incorporate threats posed both by natural and human-caused disasters. Too frequently this has resulted in costly disaster relief programs and piecemeal, ad hoc security responses, such as unattractive physical barriers that disrupt and adversely impact the physical, social, economic and civil lives in American communities.

Flooding caused an average of \$4.4 billion per year in private and public property damage between 1990 and 2003. Annual federal spending on wildfire suppression exceeds \$1.6 billion. Earthquakes cause an additional \$4.4 billion of damage each year. The World Bank and U.S.

Geological Survey have estimated that \$40 billion invested in risk reduction strategies could have saved as much as \$280 billion in worldwide economic losses from disasters in the 1990s. This translates into a seven dollar return for each dollar invested.

- **Planners support H.R. 3524 because it encourages investment in states and local governments that foster the fundamental principles of good planning. These include:**
 - Citizen engagement
 - Multi-jurisdictional cooperation
 - Multi-agency coordination
 - Implementation elements
 - Comprehensive planning
 - Updating
 - Standards

Although land use planning is rightfully within the jurisdiction of state and local governments, encouraging community safety by incorporating disaster mitigation and emergency preparedness into comprehensive land use planning and urban development should be supported by the federal government and state governments.

SPECIFIC POINTS

Congress should adopt a comprehensive safe growth agenda and do the following:

- **Restore the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to 15%**

HMGP funds are used following a disaster, when awareness of risk is high and important mitigation measures have a broad base of support. The value of mitigation programs is enhanced in a post-disaster environment because of the immediate awareness of risk and government willingness to commit state and local funds for cost-sharing with federal funds. In the tight fiscal situation that states and local communities are facing, the commitment of funds is most likely to occur when the devastation of a disaster proves the value of preventive measures.

We are concerned that the regular HMGP program was reduced in the FY 2003 appropriations bill from 15 percent to 7.5%, and urge restoration of the 15% level. Reduced federal funding means a lost opportunity for communities and localities to act as partners and make positive use of the interest generated during the post-disaster period to reduce the costs of future catastrophes.

Further, APA supports a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) formula for states with Enhanced Mitigation Plans at 20% of disaster costs, as opposed to the Administration's requested change to 12.5%. "Enhanced Plan States" have made significant commitments to disaster mitigation.

- **Adequately fund the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program**

Pre-disaster mitigation projects are being implemented at the state and local government level in accordance with hazard mitigation plans required by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. Adequate funding must be allocated for preventative measures that protect property and save lives.

Pre-Disaster Mitigation grants (PDM) are funded in the House bill at the budget request of \$150 million and in the Senate bill at \$37 million. We support the higher amount of \$150 million in the conference report for pre-disaster projects that reduce the impact and cost of future disasters.

- **Continue to support the Flood Map Modernization Initiative**

APA is grateful that both the House and Senate bills have provided \$200 million to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in FY06 for the next installment of the critically important task of updating and modernizing the nation's flood maps. In the course of developing the initiative, mapping needs have been found to be greater than when they were originally projected in 1997.

Flooding is the most common natural disaster in the country, causing between \$4 and \$6 billion in U.S. property damage annually. However, more than half of the flood-prone places in the U.S. — some 27,000 communities — have never been mapped.

The "population mapped" metric must be adjusted so that maps can be updated and not simply digitized with existing data, and the deadline for accomplishing this task should, therefore, be extended to integrate this necessary change. Up-to-date and modernized flood maps provide critical data necessary for responsible pre- and post-disaster mitigation planning by states and localities. These maps also ensure that the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) can function adequately in its role to meet citizens' needs.

- **Use risk-based assessment to determine communities in need of federal support**

Planners have a significant role to play in planning for crime prevention and security. Threat and vulnerability assessments will be flawed if they do not incorporate basic planning principles. In the preparation of threat, vulnerability, and risk assessments, APA supports the development of community-based planning strategies and design guidelines that provide guidance on how the physical environment can be designed or retrofitted in response to a threat assessment or identified threat level. These standards should be based upon risk assessments that reflect the specific needs of the community.

A one-size-fits-all approach to vulnerability assessments risks the misallocation of public and community resources. APA further supports the development and adoption of advanced methodologies for conducting threat and vulnerability assessments and best practice standards for the mitigation of threats at the building, site, and community levels. We endorse procedures for the review of subdivisions and site plans that incorporate consideration for threat and vulnerability assessments and risks, along with consideration of requirements for emergency response and for the continuity of operations.

- **Improve access to technology at the state and local level; encourage inter-jurisdictional cooperation and data sharing**

The field of planning relies heavily on good geospatial data. From parcel data to floodplain contours, the activity of planning uses geographically based sources of information to provide a basis for better decision making.

Planners often have access to local land use, building, and development data and technical resources that can be crucial to prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that planners and first responders do not easily exchange data and information, whether in day-to-day transactions or in crisis situations. Policy and technical strategies to improve these connections should be developed, especially since we know that reliance on technologies such as GIS, GPS, and related planning information systems is growing rapidly in local jurisdictions across the U.S. and that that these are vital tools in crime and crisis management.

APA endorses additional federal support for the development of coordinated and accessible GIS and related data and applications, recognizing the federal government's current role as the most important source of geographic and remote sensing data. We also support the adoption of state and local policies and procedures that will facilitate the sharing of geospatial data, along with GIS and GPS-related technological expertise, among planners and first responders for security purposes.

- **Co-sponsor H.R. 3524 and vote for its passage**