

THE PLANNING PROFESSION IN RI



RI Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-RI)

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Presentation to “Planner
Pipeline” Commission:
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TODAY'S AGENDA

What is
planning?

Why was it
created?

Why do we
need planners?

Planning in
the U.S.

Planning in
RI

WHAT IS PLANNING?

- Planning is a tool for managing growth, navigating change, and providing the needed information to make tough decision that communities face, such as where to invest in transportation, housing, and open space.
- Planning is informed by a planner's data driven insight and analysis, expertise, and sense of community need.
- The planning process helps communities define their goals and a path to achieve them.
- A plan is a roadmap that helps leaders make informed decision about what the community needs to thrive.

-American Planning Association



WHAT IS APA?

“The **American Planning Association** exists to elevate and unite a diverse planning profession as it helps communities, their leaders and residents anticipate and meet the needs of a changing world.”



- APA’s mission is to create great communities for all.
- APA-RI is one of the forty-eight APA chapters in the U.S.

WHAT IS PLANNING?

COMMUNITY PLANNING is interdisciplinary, with
direct connections to:

Architecture

Engineering

Government

Public Health

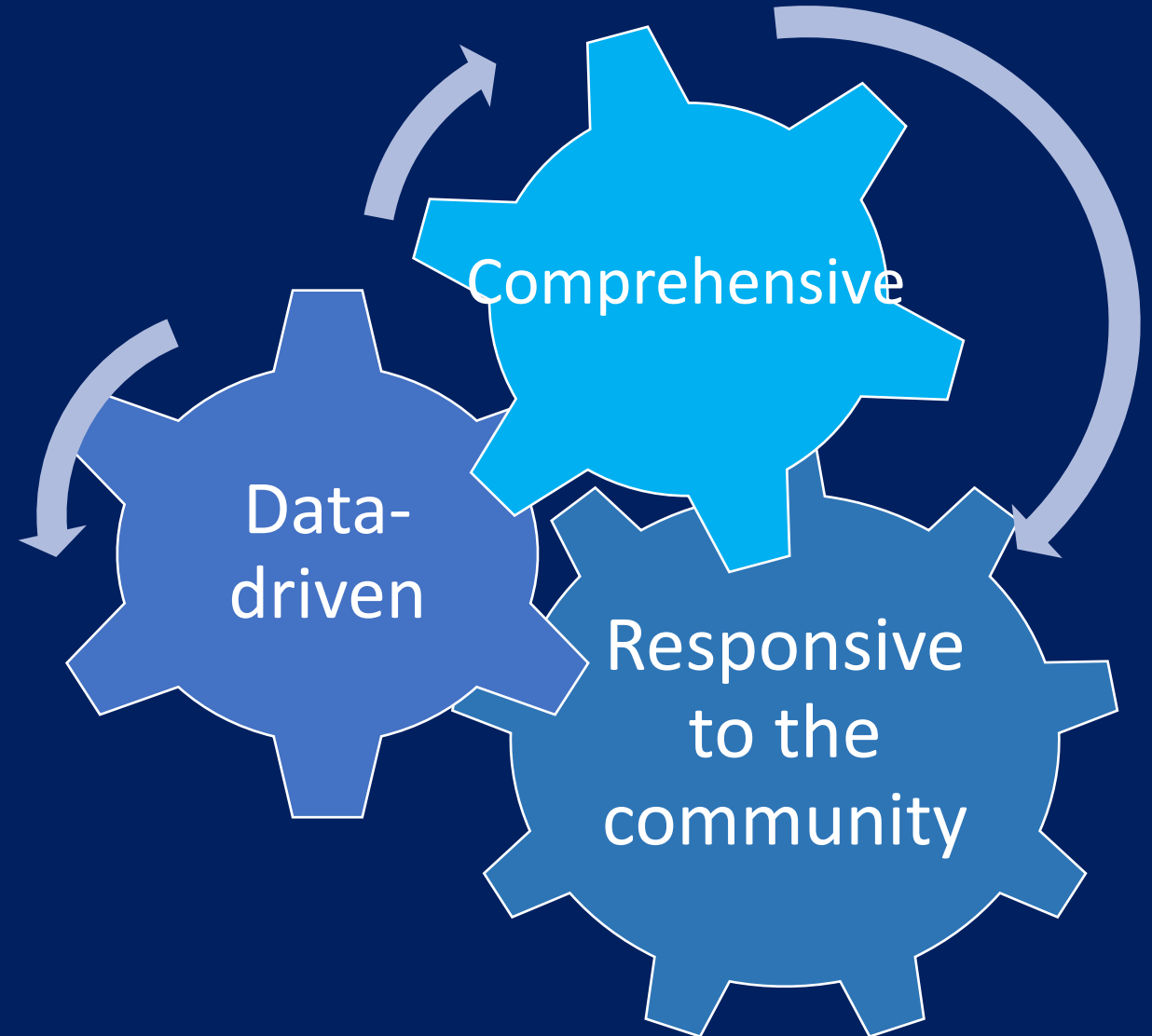
Geography

Ecology

WHAT IS PLANNING?

What are we planning for?

- Housing
- Transportation
- Services and Facilities
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Open Space
- Recreation
- Energy
- Resiliency
- Climate Change
- Economic Development
- Natural Resources



WHY DO WE PLAN?

- Educate and engage the public
- Develop vibrant communities
- Conserve natural, historic, and scenic landscapes
- Create a level of predictability for future development
- Promote economic development
- Efficient use of local services and infrastructure
- Balance property rights with community need
- Mitigate negative impacts of growth and development



HOW DO WE PLAN? IN RHODE ISLAND...

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING
AND LAND USE ACT /
STATE GUIDE PLAN

ZONING
ENABLING ACT

LAND DEVELOPMENT
AND SUBDIVISION
REVIEW ENABLING ACT



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



FUTURE LAND USE MAP

ZONING ORDINANCE



ZONING MAP

SUBDIVISION AND
LAND DEVELOPMENT
REGULATIONS

WHY DO WE NEED PLANNERS?

Planners:

- Are trained professionals who provide expert insights and balanced guidance that decision-makers need to navigate change.
- Understand and anticipate their community's unique long-term needs, ensuring policy decisions that will serve their community now and into the future.
- Undertake extensive research to arrive at recommendations that are informed, thorough, and adaptable.

WHY DO WE NEED PLANNERS?

- Planners see a broad view, providing continuity over time and offering advice informed by practical experience.
- Planners are seen as non-partisan professionals with valuable expertise — despite decision-makers generally limited understanding of the planning process itself.

However...

- A 2022 survey by APA found that planners reported **feeling unheard by their local and state elected officials.**

PLANNING IN THE U.S.

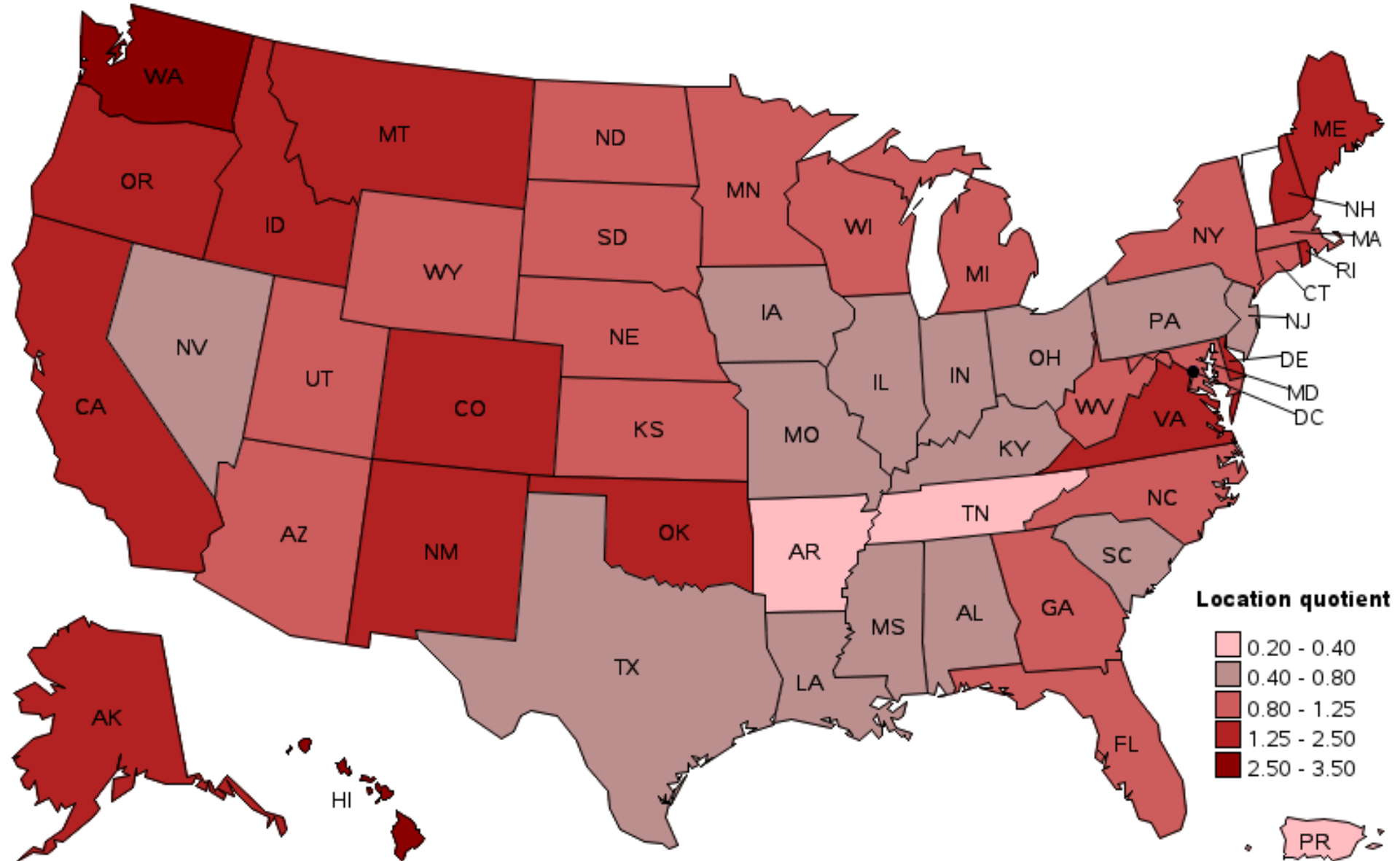
- There are approx. 45,000 planning positions in the U.S.
- Median salary is \$81,800/year and \$39.33/hour.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates job growth at 4% from 2023 to 2033, about as fast as the average for all occupations.
 - About 3,600 openings for urban and regional planners are projected each year, on average, over the decade.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, Urban and Regional Planners*, 2024. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/urban-and-regional-planners.htm>

PLANNING IN RI

- BLT estimates that there are 200 urban planner jobs in RI.
 - Includes municipal, state, and private consulting firms.
- Annual median wage: \$81,000/year (same as U.S. median)
- Median hourly wage: \$38.94/hour (lower than U.S. median).
- RI's location quotient for planners is 1.48, which means that the occupation has a higher share of employment than average.

Location Quotient of Urban and Regional Planners – May 2023



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

PLANERS IN RI

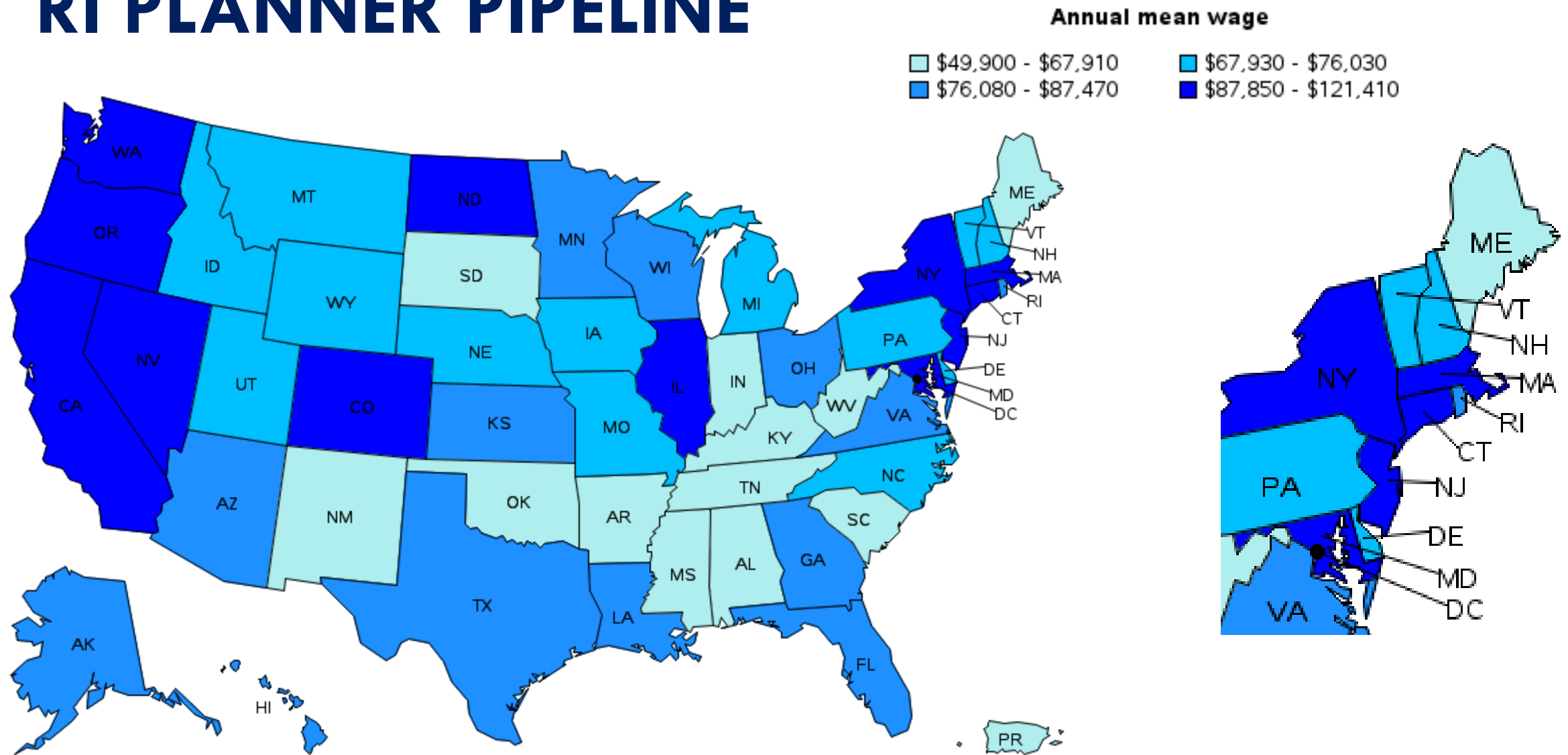
- Thirteen municipalities in RI, approximately 33%, have one planner position or less.
- One municipality has no planning position.
- Three municipalities currently have part-time consulting planners.
- Seven municipalities have two planner positions.

In total, twenty-three (or 59%) of RI municipalities have two planner positions or less.

RI PLANNER PIPELINE

- No planning graduate program in RI since 2005.
- Two planning graduate certificate programs: URI and RWU
- Eight graduate planning programs in Massachusetts: Boston University, Clark, Harvard, MIT, Northeastern, Tufts, UMass/Amherst, and UMass/Boston.
- No graduate planning programs in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, or Vermont.

RI PLANNER PIPELINE



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

RI PLANNER PIPELINE CONSIDERATIONS

- Is there enough demand to support a full-time graduate planning program in RI, now and in the future?
- Will there be enough sustained funding for an APA-accredited program?
- Will municipalities pay enough to keep planners in RI?
 - Or will planners go work somewhere else due to pay, workload, stress, etc.?

Questions?



American Planning Association
Rhode Island Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

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