



Planning for Family Friendly Communities: Motivators, Barriers and Benefits

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Introduction: Communities that keep families for the whole life cycle are more vibrant.

In 2008 Cornell University collaborated with the American Planning Association (APA) to conduct a survey of planners' roles in creating family friendly communities. The survey was developed in focus groups of practicing planners with support from several APA regional and subject area divisions (e.g. housing and community development, planning and women).

It explored three general sets of questions: planners' attitudes about the importance of families to communities, actions planners can take to support families, and barriers to the creation of family friendly communities.¹ This issue brief provides a summary of survey results and statistical analysis showing how attitudes, actions, and barriers are related, and the wider community benefits of family friendly planning.

A total of 944 planners responded from throughout the country. Forty-five percent worked in communities with a population under 50,000, 22 percent in communities with a population between 50,000 and 150,000, and 33 percent in communities with a population over 150,000.

¹ A complete report of survey findings can be found on the APA website (Israel and Warner, 2008); see Resources.

Table 1 shows planners overwhelmingly believe families are important to communities, and they recognize the need to include families in plans. Half of planners think families do not contribute sufficiently to the tax base, but economic research shows families contribute most to the local economy (Reese 2012, Warner and Baran-Rees 2012). Opportunities exist to link the needs of families with young children to those of seniors who would like to age in place by creating livable communities for all. That is the challenge and the promise of planning across generations.

The Role of Planners: A range of actions can make a difference.

Planners can address family needs in comprehensive plans, site plan and zoning regulations, housing, transportation, schools, child care, and funding for community services.

The survey defined family friendly as "communities where families enjoy housing at affordable prices, child care, parks to play in, pedestrian pathways, quality public schools, and safe neighborhoods, among many other potential features that promote family well-being." Forty-one percent of respondents reported working in communities that branded themselves family friendly. Although the branded communities showed higher

TABLE 1. Planners' attitudes towards families are positive (APA Family Friendly Planning Survey 2008)	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Families are important to community growth, sustainability, and diversity.	97%	2%	1%
Families represent a valuable consumer population.	97%	3%	0%
Communities that keep people for the whole life cycle (children, single adults, parents, elderly) are more vibrant.	90%	6%	4%
Families are the most likely population group to reinvest in their community through time, money, and other forms of civic engagement.	78%	11%	11%
The needs of families are similar to the needs of the elderly with regards to the physical environment (e.g. parks, transportation, affordable housing).	64%	6%	30%
Most families do not generate sufficient tax revenue to cover the cost of services they demand.	53%	19%	28%

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levels of action and family participation, they also faced more resistance to family friendly planning because they took more action (Israel and Warner 2008).

Action involves activities in many areas. Mobility and transportation-related items top the list – sidewalks, pedestrian pathways and streetscape improvements, bicycle lanes, school transport, and low traffic speeds all were reported by over 66 percent of respondents.

Funding is key. More than half of responding planners reported using public funds to support affordable housing, neighborhood parks, and community facilities. Impact fees were most common for parks and recreational facilities.

Although school quality is critical for families with young children, schools typically operate in a sphere of their own, and **less than half of planners reported collaborating with schools**. The lowest support is found in actions that would help families with young children with their child care. **More than 40 percent of respondents didn't know whether their community has an adequate supply of quality affordable child care**, which suggests planners need to give more attention to learning about the needs of young children.

Forty percent of communities explicitly articulate family needs in their comprehensive plans, but it is site planning and zoning that are key to advancing family interests. These elements include child care, transportation, housing, parks, street connectivity, and design guidelines. Affordable housing and child-related services are less commonly reflected in site planning

and zoning, perhaps due to lack of awareness of the needs of families with children (see detail on page 3).

While 41 percent of respondents reported they were in communities that branded themselves family friendly, **we find that family participation in the planning process is a more significant driver of action**. This includes child care at public meetings, meetings held at convenient times and places for parents, and youth participation in the planning process.

Barriers: Numerous but surmountable.

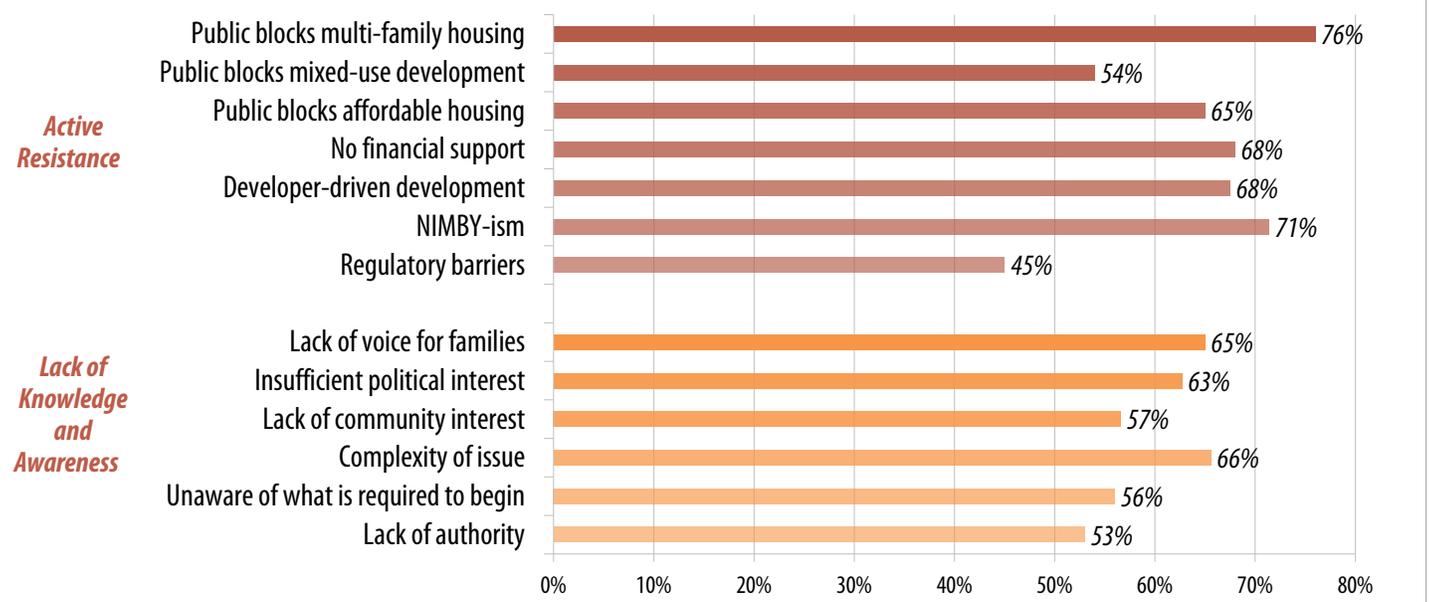
Planners face a number of challenges to building family friendly communities, but **regulatory barriers, authority, complexity, and lack of awareness of the issue are all things planners can address**. Barriers related to finance, development pressures, or public opposition (NIMBY-ism or blocking certain types of development) are differentiated from lack of awareness and knowledge (see Figure 1).

Lack of knowledge and lack of awareness are the primary factors leading to resistance. **Raising awareness about family needs can help reduce the NIMBY-ism that many communities face.**

Action: Site planning, zoning, and family participation are key to action.

We conducted a regression analysis and found that planners who work in communities with more actions that support families (e.g. affordable housing, child care, walkable streets) also engage families more in the planning process and include needs of families in

FIGURE 1. Challenges to Planning Family Friendly Communities (APA Family Friendly Planning Survey, 2008)

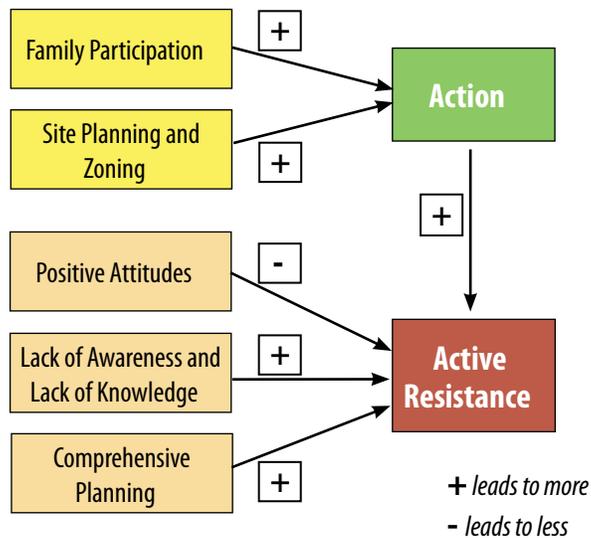


site planning and zoning (Warner and Rukus, 2013). **Of all the factors that lead to action, site planning and zoning and family participation are the most important.**

Resistance (e.g. NIMBY-ism) is higher in communities with more action. However, resistance is lower in cities and in communities that have more positive attitudes about families with children.

The most important factor leading to resistance is lack of knowledge about how to address family needs. But this can be addressed through planning and family participation. Communities that specify family friendly goals in their comprehensive plans face more resistance. Yet it is important to note that the specifics of site planning and zoning do not directly lead to resistance; indeed, these are what most lead to action. This research suggests the key to real action is family participation and addressing family needs in site planning and zoning (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.
Planning Leads to Action, Ignorance Leads to Resistance



Key variables from regression results.

Warner and Rukus, 2013, based on APA Survey 2008.

ACTIONS:

Many local actions promote child and family friendly cities.

Housing

- » Have a variety of types 67%
- » Have an adequate supply of 2+bedroom apartments 45%
- » Promote transit-oriented development 45%

Transportation & Mobility

- » Have sidewalks 97%
- » Have bike lanes 76%
- » Have walk-to-school programs 52%

Education

- » Collaborate with school district to site schools 45%
- » Co-locate services in schools 43%
- » Have an adequate supply of child care 20%

Use impact fees to subsidize...

- » Park and recreation facilities 45%
- » Schools 22%
- » Transit 16%
- » Child care 7%

Routinely use local, state, or federal funding to support...

- » Streetscape improvements 80%
- » Affordable housing 57%
- » Parks 58%
- » Child care 21%

SITE PLANNING & ZONING:

Key site planning and zoning elements can advance the interests of families.

Housing: Zoning regulations promote...

- » Multi-family housing 66%
- » Family-sized housing (2+ bedrooms) 60%
- » Affordable housing 39%
- » Accessory apartments by right 25%

Child Care: Zoning regulations promote...

- » Siting child care centers 41%
- » Family child care homes by right 34%

Development: Zoning and subdivision regulations...

- » Allow for mixed use 90%
- » Require parks/playgrounds 69%
- » Provide density bonuses 58%

Transportation and Mobility: Zoning and subdivision regulations...

- » Mandate sidewalks 80%
- » Require street connectivity with adjacent developments 75%
- » Consider pedestrian needs in site plan reviews 74%

Design/Safety: Community has...

- » Traffic calming measures in residential neighborhoods 74%
- » Lighting guidelines that address/promote safety 60%
- » Design guidelines that facilitate neighbor interaction 53%
- » Street furniture that facilitates "eyes on the street" 37%

Percentages reflect affirmative responses to items on the APA Family Friendly Planning Survey, 2008.

Broader benefits of family friendly planning: Less crime.

Obviously, communities that provide better planning and services for families with children are more livable for all ages. But are there other, broader benefits to family friendly planning? To answer this question, we matched the APA survey responses to communities where planners worked and identified 350 unique communities (Rukus and Warner, 2013). We then pulled FBI crime data on violent crime and property crime for these cities. **We were curious whether communities that engaged in family friendly planning would benefit from lower crime rates. They do!**

We controlled for community disorder (poverty, unemployment, high school drop-out rates, etc.) and then measured a set of family friendly planning variables related to Zoning and Design; Family/Youth Participation and Access to Services; Child Care and Housing; and Impact Fees. Of these factors, impact fees

had a negative impact on crime rates. What does this mean?

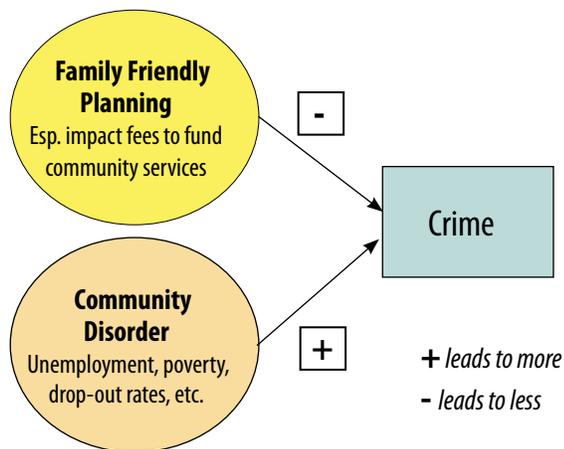
Technical planning and family participation are important, but they are not enough. In cities that use developer impact fees, services like parks, recreation, community facilities, transit, and child care receive supplemental funds from private developers, augmenting traditional sources of government funding. This is especially important in poor cities where market demand may not be strong enough to signal a supply response, or in cities where rapid growth has outstripped service delivery.

Children are only young for a short period of time. **Impact fees ensure the costs of community services are incorporated into development projects so these services are provided in a timely manner to meet the needs of the current cohort of resident children.** Impact fees benefit not just the children and families involved, but the city as a whole through lower crime rates (see Figure 4).

Promise for the Future

Family friendly planning creates communities that are more livable for all ages. **By giving special attention to the needs of families with young children, planners are also creating walkable communities with affordable housing, mixed use development, and services that meet the needs of a broad mix of residents.** Such communities are more livable and sustainable as they are able to attract and keep residents over the life course. Research also has shown that communities that invest in basic infrastructure and services for families experience greater economic growth (Reese, 2012). **Family friendly planning is a win-win for all** – residents, both young and old, developers, and local government. Planning for the needs of all ages, especially young children, builds strong, safe and economically vibrant communities.

FIGURE 4. Family Friendly Planning Reduces Crime



Rukus and Warner 2013, regression results based on APA Survey 2008.

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