

Stuart Meck Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Series On Land Use Law and Affordable Housing

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Remarks by Marya Morris

Welcome, everyone, I am very happy to be here to help kick off the inaugural Stuart Meck Distinguished Speaker Series on Land Use Law and Affordable Housing!

My name is Marya Morris. I am a planning consultant and writer and editor from the Chicago area.

I want to take a few minutes to tell you about Stuart's career and life and why we are honoring him today. Stuart held a lot of titles and won a lot of awards in his planning career, but MENTOR was the one I will remember him by as will dozens of other colleagues and maybe even some of you.

I also want to mention you that the New Jersey chapter of the APA is awarding its first Stuart Meck Distinguished Service Award for a New Jersey planner this year.

Rutgers

Stuart came to Rutgers in September 2005 when he was appointed to the dual roles of Faculty Fellow and Director of the Center for Government Services in the Bloustein School. In June 2009 he became an Associate Research Professor and Director of the Center for Planning Practice where he worked until 2016.

Each semester he taught at least two classes in urban planning. And he preferred to teach the really fun stuff:

- History and theory of planning,
- Planning law,
- Planning and land use administration,
- Affordable housing,
- Planning ethics, and
- Traffic impact analysis.

These are important core courses, but I'm guessing he didn't have to elbow any of his colleagues out of the way to get these ones.

It's very fitting that Stuart spent the last 13 years of his career here. Why? In the late 80s, while still living and working in Ohio, and almost 20 years before he even would have *contemplated* coming to work in New Jersey, he sat for and passed the exam to become a License Professional Planner (PP) in the State of New Jersey. **Who does that?** I asked him. He said he was curious what was on the test and whether he could pass it. I told him if he wanted he could probably take an exam prep course and pass the test to become a dental hygienist too.

Planning in New Jersey

Stu believed very strongly in the value and importance of planning at the local level, of course. But he was also an unapologetic advocate for planning at the state and regional level, with all the complications that come with such efforts.

- He believed that region-wide planning problems should be solved through regional level decision-making.
- He believed that states, especially ones as small and population dense as New Jersey, should have a use the allocation of state resources to shape the location and intensity of new growth and reinvestment in areas where growth makes the most sense.
- He was especially committed to any program in which the state, regional agencies, or counties (depending on the legislative framework in place) were provided technical assistance to local governments in the preparation of their plans and development regulations. *and...*
- He had a career-long commitment to crafting and implementing programs that increase the amount of affordable housing, and to disperse housing opportunities across jurisdictions.

Growing Smart

I first met Stuart in 1994, when he was hired by the American Planning Association as the principal investigator for the *Growing Smart* project.

This was a multiyear project to draft and implement the next generation of model planning, zoning, and growth management enabling legislation for the U.S. The project culminated in the *Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook* and accompanying user manual. Stuart showed up on his first day with a full scope of work and an annotated table of contents for what would become the Legislative Guidebook. We hadn't even raised \$1 to pay for the project, yet had arrived with a month of work already completed. **Again, who does that?**

The model statutes have been used by at least 15 states and provide a deep resource of information for states, regional agencies and local governments on best practices in planning and statutory reform. The *Guidebook* is an open source document that is available on the APA.

I was Stuart's aide de camp on that project. He was my intellectual inspiration for seven years, as we crisscrossed the country giving testimony to state legislatures, committees, smart growth advocacy groups like New Jersey Future, 1000 Friends of Florida, Oregon, Montana, and Illinois, among others. I think between us we visited 30 states in all and conducted audits of existing planning legislation for many of them. Stuart sent me to testify before the New Jersey State Planning Commission while they were working on the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. I was a guest of New Jersey Future that day, and I am thrilled to see that that organization is still going strong today.

Growing Smart was one of several crowning achievements in his career.

Another of his triumphs was *Ohio Planning and Zoning Law Journal*, which he co-edited with Ken Pearlman for 17 years. Stuart was a lifelong student of land use law. A lawyer without a law degree. We need a new word for that. He was conversant on every Supreme Court and appellate court decision that had any relevance to planning.

Core Values Social Science vs. Advocacy

One of the most important things I learned from Stuart was to not shy away from bringing daylight to the biggest challenges that we face in planning. In particular he always sought to address *head on* the effects of some planning policies and practices had on affordable housing and vulnerable populations. He was planning's best advocate, yes, but he was also a true political scientist—he sought out data to build a base of evidence for every planning policy that he put forward.

I hope I've adequately conveyed how important Stuart was to me and to this profession. I was so lucky to have been at the American Planning Association, in the right place at the right time, to meet him and to learn from him. I did not see him coming in my career and I definitely did NOT see him going last year. Finally, I know that Rutgers and indeed the entire planning profession are fortunate to have had him working side-by-side as one of us for so many years.

Thank you.