



News from Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc.

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Planning Communities & Transportation Systems

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Green Planning Tip

Communities can reduce paper by providing ordinances and applications on their websites. As a bonus, less staff time is spent answering routine questions that can be handled online.

Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. Celebrates 20 years of Service!

This April, Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. (BA) marks its 20th anniversary. The roots of the firm go back to the mid-1980's when David Birchler and Rod Arroyo first worked together volunteering for the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association (now MAP). They discovered that their skills and interests were complementary and that they shared a common desire to provide quality planning and transportation services to Michigan municipalities. In 1989, they launched their business in David's basement, with David's wife, Dale, as their first part-time employee. David & Rod quickly moved into their first office space on Greenfield Road in Berkley and began building their planning team.

There are some remarkable differences in how the business operated in those early years: there were no cell phones, fax machines, Internet or email. Reports and letters were printed using a (loud) daisy-wheel printer, and land use maps were hand-colored with markers. Over the years, technology added convenience and efficiency to the office.

Planning itself has also changed over the years. We think the most significant changes relate to both how we communicate and how we listen. With the development of geographic information systems (GIS), digital photography and the Internet, planning concepts can be more easily conveyed and shared with the public. Plans are filled with more graphics that illustrate examples and the consequences of actions, thus providing the opportunity for greater analysis and insight. Along with these changes, we see greater public involvement in planning these days. The public is encouraged to give more input earlier in the process. Technology allows us to move beyond the public meeting and into the virtual world, where we encourage email responses to questions and surveys, along with Internet surveys and blogs.

Over the years, David and Rod have worked hard to maintain the philosophy of BA: to develop and maintain a high quality staff, work in partnership with clients to use the talents of staff effectively, and maintain long-term relationships with clients by providing quality services and embracing creative planning.

Upon the occasion of our anniversary, while we look back over the years to see where we've been, it is also important to look forward-to see where we want to go. At BA, our team is researching planning and economic development trends in Michigan and around the country and developing new ideas to keep planning relevant in this current economic climate and in the future.

Next month, we will feature a new planning service we are launching: the NEXTSTEPS for Downtown program. Aimed at cities, villages and hamlets, this unique program results in a current "snapshot" of downtown: honest observations that point out how a downtown environment could be even better.