

## LETTER FROM FACULTY

The editors of *Agora 14* are sending this text to the printers at an exceptional pandemic time, as students, faculty, and the Ann Arbor community shelter in place. In the months since *Agora* hosted its annual autumn Salon and issued its call for papers, shuttered classrooms, empty campus sidewalks, and remote video conferencing have displaced the usual collective bustle of campus life. We are all improvising in the moment, attempting to sustain and recreate the tight-knit community of our urban planning program and beyond. Amidst this anxious, uncertain, and surreal spring season, *Agora* staffers nevertheless persist, stalwartly editing, refining, moving forward.

Some might say that in such crisis moments – faced with the immediate demands of securing groceries, staying safe, and maintaining some semblance of a normal daily routine amidst the isolation – it’s simply too hard to maintain focus on the long-term agenda of planning. Yet this is a moment when we need planning most of all: not just the specific professional knowledge to help rebuild collapsed local economies, distressed housing markets, unused public transit lines, and depleted community organizations, but also planning’s broader vision of community, of the importance of the public good, of calm rational problem solving, of taking care of immediate needs, and also of playing the long game. At a time of “social distancing,” we sorely need the faith and courage of planners to remind us of the power of social connections, and of both the vulnerability and the strength of urban communities.

As you read these baker’s dozen articles of *Agora 14*, you will see this engagement with the promise, vitality, challenges, and injustices of urban life. The themes are richly varied and internationally comparative: land conflicts, food insecurity, the intertwining of urban resilience and resistance, the shortcomings of planning academia’s cautious political stance, innovations in community GIS work, the unintended consequences of zoning and regulating smut, the promise of urban national parks, diseases of urban poverty, and the troubling urban design consequences of the booming tech sector. Several leitmotifs emerge. Authors repeatedly return to the theme of inequality, from Detroit to China (two locations that are frequent touchstones in our program). And the deepening housing crisis (worsened by growing inequality, winner-take-all urban economies and short-term rentals) reminds us of this most basic need for shelter, and the state’s abject failure to accept responsibility and sufficiently fund and support affordable, dignified housing. Overall, we see, in these pages, planning’s pragmatic mix of both professionally attending to short-term urban needs and also critically confronting the larger, enduring issues of social justice, fairness, sustainability.

Heartfelt congratulations to the authors and editors for a job well done in trying times. Getting *Agora 14* out the door, on time, is a testament to your hard work, persistence, and commitment to scholarship, each other and the larger community.

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