



**NEW JERSEY** ★  
PLANNING EXCELLENCE  
& GREAT PLACES AWARDS  
2025

*Reception*

**Tuesday, December 16 | 6:00-9:00 p.m.**  
South Orange Performing Arts Center



American Planning Association  
**New Jersey Chapter**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

December 16, 2025

Honored Guests, Distinguished Colleagues, and Friends,

On behalf of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, it is our great pleasure to welcome you to the 2025 New Jersey Planning Excellence and Great Places Awards Reception. Tonight, we celebrate the people, plans, projects, and places that exemplify collaborative, community-driven work—advancing equity, resilience, creativity, and long-term prosperity for all who call New Jersey home.

The individuals and teams we honor this evening have shown remarkable vision and leadership. Their work reflects technical expertise, public service, and a shared commitment to improving quality of life. From transformative redevelopment projects and innovative planning efforts to regional collaborations and inspired public spaces, each awardee demonstrates what's possible when we approach our communities' future with care and intention.

This year's celebration also comes at an important moment for our state. With a new administration coming into Trenton, New Jersey has a unique opportunity to elevate planning and strengthen partnerships across all levels of government. The anticipated update and adoption of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan can help ensure every community—urban, suburban, and rural—is rowing in the same direction. Now is the time to show how thoughtful, data-informed, community-engaged planning can position New Jersey as a national model for innovation and collaboration.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our sponsors for supporting this program and offer our warmest congratulations to all honorees.

Always in partnership,



Charles W. Latini, Jr.

President



Sheena Collum

Executive Director



Honoring the individuals, plans, and projects at the forefront of planning and design in New Jersey, celebrating the leadership and creativity that advance equitable development, inspire community engagement, and strengthen the places we call home.

### **Budd Chavooshian Award for Outstanding Professional Planner**

To a professional planner whose sustained contributions in practice, teaching, or scholarship have significantly advanced the quality and impact of planning in New Jersey.

### **Distinguished Civic Leadership Award**

To an elected official or citizen advocate whose leadership in the public arena has meaningfully advanced sound planning and strengthened community outcomes.

### **President's Award for Outstanding Achievement**

To an individual selected by the President of APA New Jersey whose dedication, service, and lasting contributions have notably advanced planning across the state.

### **Distinguished Emerging Planner Award**

To a professional planner, 35 years or younger, whose leadership, innovation, and commitment to growth have strengthened the practice of planning in New Jersey.

### **Outstanding Plan Award**

To a plan of exceptional merit that demonstrates innovation, inclusivity, and measurable impact in shaping more vibrant, equitable, and resilient communities.

### **Outstanding Project Award**

To a project of exceptional merit that achieves transformative results through strong partnerships, forward-thinking strategies, and meaningful community benefit.

### **Outstanding Community Engagement Award**

To a planning initiative that has broadened participation, elevated community voices, and deepened public understanding of planning decisions and outcomes.



## Budd Chavooshian Award for Outstanding Professional Planner

### **Eric C.Y. Fang, AIA, AICP, LEED AP**

With more than three decades of experience in resilience planning, transit-oriented development, and smart growth, Eric Fang has demonstrated a sustained commitment to professional excellence, collaboration, and mentorship. As Principal at Perkins Eastman and leader of the firm's Planning and Urban Design practice, he has played a key leadership role in guiding multidisciplinary teams on transformative redevelopment and urban design projects for public agencies, private developers, and institutions across New Jersey and beyond.

Through his leadership role in transit-oriented development, Eric has helped shape statewide best practices. Under NJ Transit's Transit Friendly Planning Program, he directed vision plans for more than twenty municipalities, including the award-winning Perth Amboy Transit District Strategy and the Route 9 Transit-Oriented Development Plan, which outlined a 21-mile corridor linking Middlesex and Monmouth Counties.

Eric's contributions to resilience planning have strengthened coastal communities across the region. His leadership in the Hoboken Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan and NJ FRAMES (Fostering Regional Adaptation through Municipal Economic Scenarios) established models for climate adaptation and collaborative regional planning. His guidance on the Atlantic County Coastal Region Resilience and Adaptation Plan earned NJDEP's inaugural Innovation Award.

A dedicated educator and mentor, Eric teaches at NYU and Rutgers and serves on the Village of Tuckahoe Planning Board. His leadership, collaborative approach, and enduring commitment to advancing equitable, sustainable communities embody the ideals of the Budd Chavooshian Award for Outstanding Professional Planner.



## President's Award for Outstanding Achievement

### **Tara B. Paxton, MPA, AICP, PP**

Tara B. Paxton has devoted nearly three decades to public service, earning widespread respect as one of New Jersey's most accomplished and community-minded planners. As Director of the Division of Land Use & Planning and Community Development for Brick Township, Tara oversees a broad range of municipal initiatives including redevelopment, affordable housing, grant administration, and environmental preservation. Her leadership has helped make Brick a state and national model for coastal resiliency, sustainability, and thoughtful land use.

Among her many achievements, Tara authored the Redevelopment Plan for the Brick Landfill—transforming a 40-acre Superfund site into a \$40-million solar energy project recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "ReUse Award." She also guided the redevelopment of Trader's Cove Park and Marina, highlighted in the U.S. Department of the Interior's America's Great Outdoors Fifty State Report, and led multi-park initiatives honored by the NJ Recreation & Parks Association for design excellence.

Following Superstorm Sandy, Tara's steady leadership was instrumental in coordinating recovery efforts, securing FEMA reimbursements, and achieving a FEMA Community Rating System Class 6 designation that reduced flood insurance premiums for local residents.

A dedicated mentor and educator, Tara teaches planning, sustainability, and ethics at Rowan and Kean Universities, inspiring future planners through real-world case studies and practical insight. She also contributes her expertise through APA Planning Assistance Teams and community sustainability efforts.

Tara Paxton's career reflects the highest ideals of the planning profession—integrity, service, and a steadfast commitment to improving lives through thoughtful, inclusive, and enduring community planning.



## Distinguished Civic Leadership Award

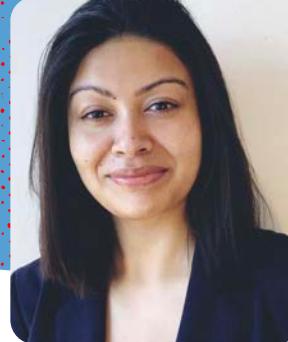
### **Julia Somers**

For more than three decades, Julia Somers has exemplified civic leadership, environmental stewardship, and an unwavering commitment to sound planning across New Jersey. As the Founding Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, she has led the organization with extraordinary vision and dedication since 2006, transforming it from a modest alliance of 25 groups into a dynamic coalition of more than 120 partners united in protecting the Highlands' natural and cultural treasures.

Under Julia's leadership, the Coalition's "Your Water, Your Future" initiative has brought statewide recognition to the Highlands' vital role in providing clean drinking water to over 70 percent of New Jersey's residents, strengthening climate resilience, and supporting sustainable local economies.

A protégé of the late Candy Ashmun, Julia's distinguished career includes founding the Great Swamp Watershed Association, serving as Chair of the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, and contributing her expertise as a member of the New Jersey State Planning Commission. Her lifelong advocacy has advanced policies rooted in smart growth, resource protection, and collaboration among government, citizens, and the planning profession.

Through her leadership, the Highlands Coalition has awarded more than \$500,000 in grants to grassroots organizations safeguarding the region's water and landscapes—a remarkable accomplishment for a small nonprofit. Julia Somers stands as a true champion of New Jersey's environment and a shining example of how civic vision, planning, and persistence can preserve the Garden State for generations to come.



## Distinguished Emerging Planning Award

### **Charvi Gupta**

Charvi Gupta represents a new generation of planners who lead with purpose, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion. Throughout her career, she has championed diversity and multicultural awareness while advancing the integration of technology, sustainability, and social impact in transportation planning.

As lead for the Community Transportation Electrification Planning and Pilot Program, Charvi has guided a groundbreaking statewide initiative advancing NJ TRANSIT's transition to a zero-emission fleet—encompassing more than 2,200 vehicles across 89 agencies. Under her leadership, the program prioritized community engagement, workforce development, and equitable technology adoption, serving as a catalyst for systemic change toward sustainable and inclusive mobility.

Charvi's collaborative approach unites agency officials, technical specialists, and community representatives around shared goals, while her emphasis on mentorship and gender equity has cultivated a diverse, cross-disciplinary project team—nearly half of whom are women. She continues to inspire emerging professionals through the Clean Community Transportation Taskforce, fostering peer learning and local leadership to sustain long-term change.

Beyond New Jersey, Charvi's work at WSP and Uber has shaped global conversations on electric mobility, multimodal integration, and equitable access. She has authored influential white papers on microtransit, zero-emission bus transitions, and the future of shared mobility.



## Outstanding Plan Award

# Route 9 Transit-Oriented Development Plan

**Project Partners:** NJ TRANSIT | Perkins Eastman | FHI Studio, now IMEG | Mercer Planning Associates | RES Group

The Route 9 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan represents a transformative vision for one of New Jersey's most important commuter corridors. Spanning 21 miles between Old Bridge in Middlesex County and Howell Township in Monmouth County, Route 9 carries some of NJ TRANSIT's highest-volume bus routes—yet historically has been characterized by auto-oriented development and underutilized land. Funded through a Federal Transit Administration grant and developed by NJ TRANSIT's Transit Friendly Planning Program, the Plan reimagines this “sleeping giant” as a corridor of connected, walkable, and transit-supportive communities.

Grounded in extensive data analysis and public engagement—including virtual open houses, surveys, and stakeholder workshops—the Plan provides a flexible, incremental framework for transforming underperforming shopping centers, park-and-ride lots, and single-use developments into compact, mixed-use neighborhoods. It offers a strategic toolkit tailored to 17 station areas, recommending transit-oriented infill, adaptive reuse, accessory dwelling units, and pedestrian connectivity improvements to enhance access to transit and reduce combined housing and transportation costs.

The Plan's vision is guided by five implementation tracks—improved bus service, access to transit, transit-friendly land use and zoning, partnerships, and consensus-driven vision—allowing municipalities, counties, and agencies to advance progress collaboratively and incrementally. By integrating land use, transportation, and housing strategies, the Route 9 TOD Plan positions the corridor for future bus rapid transit, smart growth, and equitable development, offering a statewide model for how established suburban corridors can evolve into sustainable, inclusive, and transit-ready communities.



## Outstanding Project Award

# The Crossings at Brick Church Station

**Project Partners:** City of East Orange | Incline Capital | Triangle Equities | McManimon, Scotland & Baumann | NW Financial | NJEDA | PNC Bank | Goldman Sachs | Basis Investment Group | Minno & Wasko | Bohler Engineering | Sills Cummis & Gross | 1868 Public Affairs | Mercury | THA Consulting

The Crossings at Brick Church Station represents one of the most ambitious and transformative redevelopment projects in East Orange's history. Building on decades of local planning and the City's Transit Village District Redevelopment Plan, The Crossings brings to life a long-held vision to create a vibrant, inclusive, and transit-oriented community centered around the Brick Church Train Station. Co-developed by Incline Capital and Triangle Equities, this mixed-use project reimagines a former strip mall and underutilized commercial site into a dynamic destination that combines housing, retail, and public spaces in the heart of the city.

Once complete, the project will deliver 820 new residential units—including 167 affordable homes—along with approximately 200,000 square feet of retail and commercial space anchored by a new ShopRite supermarket. The development integrates a mix of unit types to serve diverse incomes and family sizes, advancing East Orange's goal of promoting social and economic diversity near transit. A new pedestrian promenade, outdoor dining, and thoughtfully designed public and private open spaces will enhance the public realm and strengthen connections between Main Street and the train station.

Implementation has already seen major milestones, including the completion of a seven-story parking structure and the launch of Phase I construction. Supported by NJEDA's ASPIRE tax credit program, The Crossings at Brick Church Station stands as a model for equitable, transit-supportive redevelopment—revitalizing East Orange's downtown, catalyzing future investment, and reaffirming the city's role as a hub of smart growth and opportunity.



# Greening Camden

## Outstanding Community Engagement Award

**Project Partners:** Rowan University Department of Geography, Planning & Sustainability | Camden Community Partnership | New Jersey Tree Foundation | Center for Environmental Transformation | Neighborhood Collaborative Community Gardens | Social Responsibility Through Me | Cooper Medical School

Greening Camden: Educating, Empowering, and Enriching Communities for Climate Action and Cleaner Air is a transformative initiative that redefines environmental planning as a community learning process—one that educates, empowers, and unites residents to co-create a healthier, more sustainable city. Supported by the U.S. EPA's Environmental Education Program and the TD Bank–sponsored Green Jobs Academy, the project bridges urban planning, environmental science, and civic engagement to address air quality, climate resilience, and environmental justice across Camden City.

Through a blend of education, visualization, and hands-on action, Greening Camden transforms residents into partners in planning. Its seven-stage learning framework—awareness, knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, action, and stewardship—guides participants through how planners

analyze, prioritize, and implement environmental solutions. From K-12 students and teachers to university classes and neighborhood leaders, hundreds have taken part in workshops, citizen-science air monitoring, and community greening events that build environmental literacy and local capacity.

The project's accessible online resources, including the Greening Camden Toolkit, interactive maps, and videos, make complex planning concepts understandable and actionable for non-experts. Real-world implementation has produced measurable outcomes—from community tree plantings and park cleanups to school-based learning and participatory data collection—demonstrating how education can lead directly to environmental improvement.

By embedding environmental education into planning practice and empowering residents as civic scientists and stewards, Greening Camden offers an inspiring model for how planners can advance climate action, equity, and community engagement simultaneously.

All materials and outcomes are available at [planviz.org/greening-camden](http://planviz.org/greening-camden).



## What Makes a Great Place?

Great Places in New Jersey represent the gold standard of exemplary character, quality and planning. These places have a true sense of place, cultural and historical interest, community involvement and a vision for tomorrow.

New Jersey's great downtowns, public spaces, streets, and neighborhoods are defined by many criteria, including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community activity.



# Downtown Metuchen

Once a quiet commuter suburb, Downtown Metuchen has undergone a remarkable transformation into one of New Jersey's most vibrant, walkable, and inclusive downtowns. Guided by visionary planning, strategic redevelopment, and an extraordinary spirit of volunteerism, this 3-square-mile borough of 15,000 residents has become a model of small-town revitalization done right.

The renaissance began a decade ago with the redevelopment of a central surface parking lot into Woodmont Metro at Metuchen Station, a mixed-use, transit-oriented anchor featuring 500 luxury apartments, first-floor retail, a public plaza, and a 700-space parking structure. This redevelopment—just steps from the NJ Transit station—sparked renewed investment, attracting Whole Foods Market and a diverse mix of restaurants, boutiques, and experience-based businesses that now define Main Street's vitality.

At the heart of this success is the Metuchen Downtown Alliance (MDA)—a tenacious nonprofit powered largely by volunteers and one staff member—whose mission is to foster a welcoming, walkable, and art-filled downtown. Through storefront grants, murals, and hundreds of events celebrating local culture, music, and heritage, the MDA has built a downtown that is both a destination and a community hub.

Nationally recognized as the 2023 Great American Main Street Award winner and 2024 NJ Best Destination of the Year, Downtown Metuchen continues to thrive through partnerships, creativity, and civic pride. From family-friendly festivals to spontaneous pop-up celebrations, Metuchen embodies the joyful, human-scale spirit that makes great downtowns truly unforgettable.





# South Mountain Reservation

Spanning more than 2,000 acres across West Orange, Maplewood, Millburn, and bordering South Orange, Essex County's South Mountain Reservation is one of New Jersey's most treasured natural landscapes and a shared public space that unites communities across the region. Designed in part by Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American landscape architecture, the Reservation embodies his enduring belief in nature's power to heal, inspire, and connect people living in urban environments.

A "green island amid a sea of urbanization," South Mountain Reservation offers visitors a remarkable balance between accessibility and wilderness—just six miles from downtown Newark. Its varied terrain of ridgelines, forested valleys, and streams invites exploration through miles of scenic hiking trails, including

the beloved South Mountain Fairy Trail, where volunteers have built whimsical "fairy houses" that delight visitors of all ages. Iconic features such as Hemlock Falls, panoramic overlooks with sweeping New York City views, and an expansive dog park create spaces for recreation, reflection, and connection.

The South Mountain Recreation Complex, located within the Reservation, enhances the visitor experience with family-friendly amenities such as Turtle Back Zoo, the Richard J. Codey Arena, MiniGolf Safari, paddle boating on the Orange Reservoir, and the Regatta Playground—all seamlessly integrated with the natural surroundings.

Stewarded by the South Mountain Conservancy, this extraordinary landscape stands as both a refuge for nature and a civic commons for people. It strengthens regional identity, fosters volunteerism and stewardship, and offers generations a place to learn, play, and reconnect with the natural world.

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## 2025 New Jersey Planning Excellence & Great Places Awards

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to all the honorees!”*

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CONGRATULATIONS  
TO THIS YEAR'S HONOREES &  
THE CROSSINGS AT BRICK CHURCH  
STATION TEAM



THANK YOU TO MAYOR GREEN &  
THE EAST ORANGE CITY COUNCIL

THE  
**CROSSINGS**  
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**McManimon, Scotland & Baumann, LLC**  
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## **Mayor Ted R. Green**

and the City of East Orange on receiving the  
*Outstanding Project Award* for the  
**THE CROSSINGS AT BRICK CHURCH.**

MS&B is proud to have supported the City  
in bringing this important project to fruition.

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Rowan University proudly supports APA-NJ as we educate the next generation of planning professionals and support the communities of New Jersey and beyond

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**Congratulations  
Route 9 TOD Plan  
for winning the  
Outstanding  
Plan Award!**

Mercer Planning Associates is proud to have served on the Route 9 TOD Plan project team. We believe the best plans are those built with the voices of the community at the table. We specialize in public engagement and strategic planning, ensuring that residents, stakeholders, and leaders work hand-in-hand to shape the future of their communities.

Let's plan the future—with you, not just for you.



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Tel 732.354.1316  
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Congratulations to The Crossings at Brick Church on receiving the Outstanding Project Award, and to all other recipients of the NJ Planning Excellence and Great Places Awards!

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*Perkins Eastman proudly congratulates  
NJ TRANSIT, recipient of the Outstanding Plan Award  
for the Route 9 TOD Plan, and*

*Eric Fang, honored with the Budd Chavooshian Award  
for Outstanding Professional Planner as part of  
the 2025 New Jersey Planning Excellence and  
Great Places Awards.*

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**Congratulations to Downtown Metuchen  
on being designated a 'Great Downtown'**



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WE PROUDLY RECOGNIZE TARA PAXTON  
FOR HER EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND  
COMMITMENT TO PLANNING EXCELLENCE.



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*Revitalizing Established Communities.....*

Nishuane Group, LLC is an urban planning consultancy headquartered in Montclair, New Jersey. Founded in 2007, the firm is comprised of a diverse team of licensed and certified planning professionals, who possess a broad range of experience that crosses public sector planning, nonprofit leadership, private practice, and academia. Our clients include large and small municipalities in urban and suburban communities, private developers, community-based organizations, and State government agencies. The firm is MWBE, DBE and SBE-Certified.



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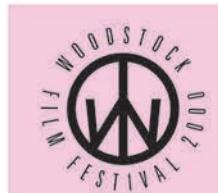
**NJ TRANSIT Congratulates our  
Transit Friendly Planning Team**

*for winning a*  
**NJ APA Outstanding Plan Award**  
*for the Route 9 TOD Plan*





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# Thank you!

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, we extend our deepest gratitude to Chuck Latini for his extraordinary 15 years of dedicated service as Chapter President.

Chuck's steady leadership, institutional knowledge, and unwavering commitment to advancing sound planning have left an indelible mark on APA New Jersey and the communities it serves. Under his guidance, the Chapter grew in strength, relevance, and impact, navigating change with integrity and vision.

We thank Chuck for his remarkable service and lasting legacy, and we are profoundly grateful for all he has given to the profession and our Chapter.

# 2025 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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The New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association is an independent, not-for-profit organization (501c3) that provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning, promoting citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change.

