

Community Development Services



18-Month Report
Jan 2019
to **June 2020**

Building Safety | Economic Development | Grants Management | Planning

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Message from the Director



Lorrie Pearson
Director of Community Development Services
at the City of Urbana

Welcome to the first report for the Community Development Services Department combining the work of our divisions: **Building Safety**, **Economic Development**, **Grants Management**, and **Planning**. As we shift from calendar year to fiscal year reporting, this report highlights our department's contributions for 18 months, from January 2019 – June 2020, with exceptions where noted.

During the last 18 months, construction activity was strong, with several large development projects getting underway and new home construction spurred by the Think Urbana incentive program. Dozens of businesses received grant assistance to open or expand, and others were assisted through enabling the use of outdoor space. Arts and Culture events and the Urbana Market at the Square welcomed thousands of attendees.

The period also marked the kick-off of the first community-wide comprehensive planning efforts in more than 15 years, and both the Pedestrian Master Plan and the Bicycle Wayfinding Plan were completed.

During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, dozens of households received rental assistance, 24 new affordable units were enabled, and nearly 20 homes were rehabilitated. In conjunction with Cunningham Township, the Consolidated Social Service Fund helped more than 2,600 low- and moderate-income individuals.

And as you will see in the pages that follow, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic during part of this reporting period, we have continued to serve the people and businesses of Urbana.

Lorrie



Building Safety Division



Staff

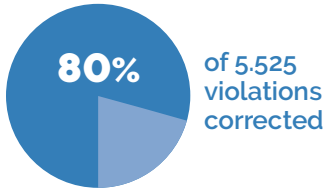
Nick Hanson	Building Official
Corey Ireland	Plumbing Inspector
Jamie Lance	Electrical Inspector
Jason Arrasmith	Code Compliance Inspector I
Tom Dwyer	Code Compliance Inspector II
Michael Frank	Code Compliance Inspector II

City of Urbana Building Safety

Mission

Promoting health, safety, and quality of life in the built environment through timely and fair administration of building and property maintenance codes

Code violations



Sign permits

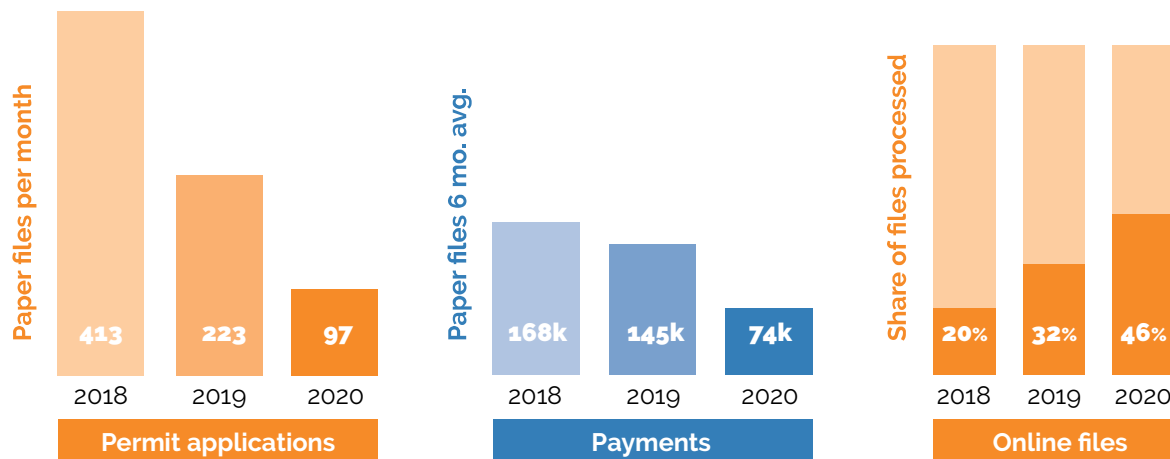


Fence permits



Building Safety processes a lot of documents between permit review processes and code enforcement. Our transition to online processing cut down on the amount of paper we use during these processes. It also facilitated a smooth transition to video inspections during the pandemic to keep inspectors and residents safe while continuing our work.

Removing paper from the process & going digital



Online files processed exceeded paper files in a single month for the first time ever in June 2020.

The share of processing done online has steadily increased since we began using Citizenserve, an online portal for citizens, property owners, businesses, and contractors. In the first 6 months of 2020, Building Safety had already processed as many online requests as in all of 2019.



Economic Development Division

Staff

Brandon S. Boys, AICP
Stepheny McMahon
Rachel Lauren Storm, M. Ed.
Bryan Heaton
HeatherAnn Hicks-Layman

Economic Development Manager (former)
Economic Development Coordinator & Interim Supervisor
Arts & Culture Coordinator
Market at the Square Coordinator
Program Specialist

+ 21 part-time, intern, & volunteer staff members



City of Urbana Economic Development

Mission

Fostering urban development, entrepreneurial growth, cultural vibrancy, & quality of life in Urbana through the implementation of City plans & priorities



2019 set the stage for several large, formative projects to begin in 2020, including **200 Vine**, **Gather**, & the **Urbana Landmark Hotel**.

City-owned properties are being prepared for future use, including a **renegotiated lease with Lincoln Square** & a **new small-scale farming plot**.

Incentive programs and outreach efforts fostered diversification and growth in **residential, commercial, & downtown businesses** in 2019.

Business & Development ▼

\$46
million

to be invested in
three major projects
in 2020

24

new single-family homes
built (14% of Champaign
County's total)

28

new or expanding businesses
received grants or
redevelopment assistance

First new residential
construction in
Downtown Urbana

in over
14
years

Urbana Arts & Culture ▼

250,000 event attendees

including

6,500 youth & family
programs participants

3,450 artists

directly benefited
from UAC initiatives



Market at the Square ▼

3,000

Market
visitors
per week

\$23,326

in **SNAP**
benefits & match dollars
to **268** individuals



2019 set the table for three formative 2020 projects.

First, the City finalized an agreement for *Green Street Realty* to construct a 42 unit townhome-style development at **200 Vine** at a minimum investment of **\$6.0MM**. *This is the first new residential construction in Downtown Urbana in over 14 years.*

The **Gather North** project established its qualifications for Enterprise Zone incentives in 2019 as a mixed use project, combining student housing with an extended stay hotel. The **\$25MM** project is expected to transform the appearance of the university's "gateway intersection" at University and Lincoln Avenues.

The City entered into a redevelopment agreement in 2019 for the renovation of the **Urbana Landmark Hotel** into a *Tapestry by Hilton* at a minimum construction cost of \$15MM. The project is expected to fully reactivate the great hall, conference center, and restaurant/bar, retaining the historic character of the federally listed property.

This past year, staff also prepared multiple City-owned sites for future use.



In **Northwest Urbana**, the City owns seven acres of excess right-of-way at North Lincoln Avenue and Olympian Drive. A new lease agreement with **Prairie Fruits Farms** is expected to result in a small grains and vegetable demonstration plot to *expand the availability of locally produced foods and to encourage agritourism.*

Staff also successfully renegotiated the City's lease agreement with **Lincoln Square** to clarify the City's right to *redevelop the City-owned parking lots* south of Illinois Street. This provides the City flexibility for future use.

And the City's incentive programs added to the diversity of businesses and accessibility of home ownership.

Think Urbana helped bring **24 new single-family homes** to the city.

Think Urbana is a program of the Urbana Enterprise Zone that provides financial incentives including property tax abatement and sales tax exemptions to eligible construction in the zone, which can lower new housing construction costs.

North Urbana welcomed **3 new projects**: *JX Enterprises* completed a new **\$3.0MM** semi-truck service & sales center; *El Progresso* began construction of a new, **\$700,000** international grocery store & carniceria; & *Culver's* completed a new **\$2.5MM** restaurant.

In **Southeast Urbana**, *Little Hearts & Hands Day Care* began construction on a new **\$2.2MM** building to house a private school for children ages K-2, while *Sunnycrest Mall* invested **\$150,000** in two commercial spaces, one to house the Beyond Hair Beauty Salon and the second to market to a potential tenant.

28 businesses received grants or redevelopment assistance, many of which are in **Downtown**, including *Rick's Bakery*, *Baldarotta's*, *Yellow Canary Café*, and the reopened *Sitara Indian Restaurant*. Downtown is also home to new and expanding performing arts, retail and wellness businesses like the *Urbana Dance Company & Defy Gravity*, *Bohemia & Enchantment Alley*, and *Soul Care*.

City of Urbana Economic Development

The Urbana Arts & Culture Program

has been celebrating and nurturing the City of Urbana's cultural and artistic diversity since 2008. In 2019, UAC-sponsored programs hosted **250,000 attendees**, including **6,500 for youth & family programs**, and **3,450 artists directly benefited** from UAC initiatives.

This past year, the program transitioned from Urbana Public Arts Program to the **Urbana Arts and Culture Program**, inclusive of research into feasibility, visioning, and revisions of mission and vision.

Arts & Culture assumed management of an additional **\$35,000 in annual grant funding** in 2019, expanding the *Urbana Arts Grant Program* to **\$80,000 in annual giving**.

UAC introduced *Urbana's Downtown Get Down* summer festival and launched the City's *Poet Laureate Program* in 2019, the third of its kind in the state of Illinois. The inaugural Poet Laureate, Will Reger, has launched numerous poetry civic engagement projects including *Poets on a Park Bench* TV series, *Laureate Likes* digital displays of local poetry, and *Poems on Glass* mural interpretation program, all in addition to workshops, public talks, and performances.

Arts & Culture also continued to establish relationships with youth employment and internship programs in *Urbana School District #116*, *Regional Planning Commission*, and the *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*, including Care4U, Executive Internship, Community Learning Lab, and the YWCA's Women in Leadership Program.

Urbana's Market at the Square

in 2019 hosted **204 vendors** over **26 Saturdays**, May to November, rain, shine, snow, or sleet, with an average of over **3,000 visitors per week**. In 2020, we adjusted quickly to keep the market open safely during the pandemic.

The Market featured local fruit and vegetable growers, meat producers, bakers, and creative artisans. In total, there were **51 produce growers** and **66 artisans**, both increases from 2018. The Market also hosted **12 food trucks** and **52 community groups**, covering religious, political, and environmental topics.

The Market's SNAP program, in operation since 2011, increased the amount of benefits it matched to \$25 in the 2019 season. Over the course of the season the Market distributed **\$23,326 in SNAP benefits and match dollars** to **268 individuals**.

Entertainment and educational programs at the Market included:

- *Art at the Market*, sponsored by the Urbana Arts and Culture Program
- *Read at the Market*, sponsored by the Urbana Free Library
- *Sprouts at the Market*, a farming and nutritional education program
- *Welcoming Week* activities provided by community groups and businesses
- UIUC's *Science at the Market* • CU Potters club • Mobile Art Cart • Weiskamp Screen Printing
- School for Designing a Society • New American Welcome Center • Afro Caribbean Jazz Collective

Grants Management Division

Based on Fiscal Year 2018-2019



Staff

Sheila Dodd
Alyssa Jaje

Grants Management Division Manager
Community Development Specialist



City of Urbana Grants Management

Mission

Seeking and administering grant funding from a variety of sources to provide affordable housing, strengthen neighborhoods, and help individuals meet their needs

Grants Management works closely with Cunningham Township, City of Champaign, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, and local social service organizations.



Funding for **Grants Management** initiatives comes from a variety of sources, including:

The Consolidated Social Service Fund, (next page)

Urbana HOME Consortium,

& City general funds.

HOME is a joint effort by the City of Urbana, the City of Champaign, and Champaign County Regional Planning Commission to obtain federal grant funds for affordable housing initiatives. Funds benefit low- & moderate-income residents by **rehabbing homes & transitional housing rental units, developing affordable units, providing rental assistance, & bringing single-family houses up to code.**

(With help from Building Safety.)

2 rehabilitations
of entire homes through HOME

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) is a program of the HOME Consortium. Funds can be administered to local organizations, who assist directly.

53 people
supported by TBRA through Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, Rosecrance, & Courage Connection

2 new affordable single-family homes built by Habitat for Humanity & funded through TBRA

47 households
provided affordable rental housing units

24 permanent units
of affordable housing enabled

Grants secured Low-Income Housing Tax Credits for developers at Pinewood Place

17 rehabilitations
of owner-occupied homes

• Administered through Emergency Grant and Senior Repair Programs

• Funded by CDBG

Urbana's Emergency Grant Program funds home repairs for very low-income homeowners

Urbana's Senior Repair Service funds minor home maintenance for seniors and people with disabilities

Community Development Block Grants are federal annual formula-based grants to improve living environments and expand economic opportunities primarily for low- and moderate-income residents.



City of Urbana Grants Management

The Consolidated Social Service Fund (CSSF)

is a partnership between the City of Urbana and Cunningham Township. CSSF funding allows uniquely important local non-profit social service agencies to grow their impact. Urbana City Council's priorities for the program include to **expand affordable housing, eliminate housing discrimination, and promote paths to employment for at-risk youth.**

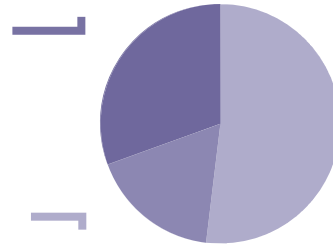
\$237,000 to 21 local organizations

Public services provided to **2,667** low- & moderate-income people

Housing & Homelessness | \$71,000 | 30% of CSSF

The \$30,000 to **CU Men's Shelter** helped it to open earlier in 2019 than in years past, providing homeless men with more places to keep warm on frigid winter nights.

- CSSF funds helped provide stable housing and case management for 2 formerly homeless local families.



Youth Services | \$38,000 | 16% of CSSF

The **Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center** received \$28,000 to help expand two of its programs:

- The *Urbana Youth Development Program*, which helps high school juniors and seniors navigate life after high school, received \$16,000;
- The *Community Study Center*, providing a structured space for children to grow academically and bridge the achievement gap, received \$12,000.



CSSF funding is allocated according to Cunningham Township and Urbana City Council priorities. The **Cunningham Township Supervisor's Office** provided \$175,000 and administered the majority of grants. The City of Urbana (\$70,000) and a Community Development Block Grant (\$5,000) provided the remaining funds.

Organization	'18-19	'19-20	Funding Purpose
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Organization	'18-19	'19-20	Funding Purpose
First Followers	\$15,600	\$20,000	Development ('19), program director ('20)
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission	\$22,000	\$18,000	Youth assessment ctr. ('19), intake of homeless ('19, '20)
Champaign County Health Care Consumers	\$21,000	\$21,000	Health worker services ('19), client services ('20)
Eastern Illinois Food Bank	\$10,000	\$10,000	Urbana food distribution ('19, '20)
University YMCA	\$9,000	\$15,500	New American Welcome Center ('19, '20)
Family Service of Champaign County	\$22,700	\$16,000	Senior programs ('19, '20)
Crisis Nursery	\$11,000	\$15,000	Safe Children Program ('19, '20)
Courage Connection	\$23,000	-----	Domestic Violence Services Program ('19)
CRIS Healthy Aging Center	-----	\$15,000	Senior information services ('20)



Planning Division



Staff

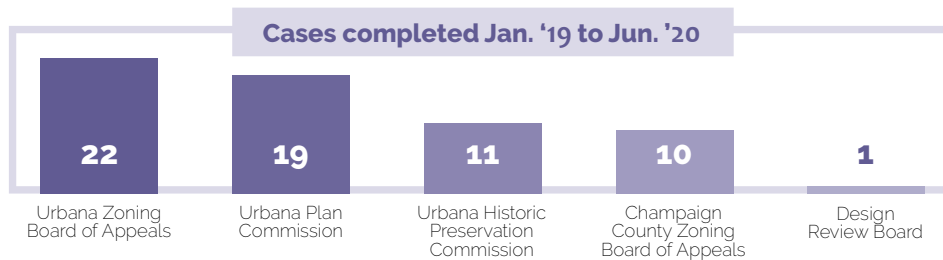
Kevin Garcia	Principal Planner
Marcus Ricci	Planner II
Lily Wilcock	Planner I
Kat Trotter	Planner I
Sam Ihm	Intern
Swati Rastogi	Intern



Mission

Engaging the community to create a vision for the future and facilitating quality development in accordance with that vision

Planning, along with **Building Safety**, annually reviews dozens of development applications & assists developers to ensure compliance with existing policies. Planning guides these applicants through the approval process with the appropriate governing body. Additionally, Planning facilitates resident requests for changes to their own properties and responds to zoning policy inquiries. This spring, planners hustled to help businesses move outdoors as soon as the pandemic arrived.



First comprehensive plan since 2005 begun

2 major plans adopted

The **Pedestrian Master Plan** and **Bicycle Wayfinding Plan** are updates to existing frameworks that go hand-in-hand to encourage healthy, active transportation. Planning partner **Champaign County Regional Planning Commission** led their creation with input & expertise from City engineers & planners. The City of Urbana funded these plans.

The Pedestrian Master Plan*

strives to make Urbana more walkable and accessible for all people.

Walking promotes good health. More walkable places also experience economic benefits. The City of Urbana aims to make it easy and enjoyable for residents to walk as part of daily life.

Recommendations of the plan include:

- repair and expand sidewalk and street-crossing infrastructure according to plan's prioritized lists of in-need areas
- promote walkability in developments and existing neighborhoods
- add benches, public art, and kid-friendly areas in public spaces
- protect corridors linking green spaces
- improve lighting in high-traffic areas
- incorporate open space and street trees in street improvement projects

The Bicycle Wayfinding Plan**

"aims to enhance safety and improve infrastructure for current bicyclists, while seeking to increase the number of bicyclists by targeting casual or less confident riders."

Wayfinding facilitates bikers' navigation to destinations by creating routes and providing signs to keep riders safe and informed on their way.

Recommendations of the plan include:

- add bike routes near 6 schools
- install bikeways in low-income areas
- improve bike access to employers
- connect all of Urbana's parks
- enhance and adding bike trail signs

* *Pedestrian Master Plan*
<https://www.urbanaininois.us/pedmasterplan>

** *Bicycle Wayfinding Plan*
<https://ccrpc.org/documents/urbana-bicycle-wayfinding-master-plan-final-report-2020/>



Prepared for

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October 2020

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Lorrie Pearson, Community Development Services Director

and support from

Lily Wilcock, Planner I

