

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 7, 2020

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NEWS RELEASE

2020 Best Article in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* Award

The Urban Affairs Association (UAA) is the international professional organization for urban scholars, researchers, and public/nonprofit service providers. UAA is dedicated to creating interdisciplinary spaces for engaging in intellectual and practical discussions about urban life. Through theoretical, empirical, and action-oriented research, the UAA fosters diverse activities to understand and shape a more just and equitable urban world. UAA sponsors the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, a refereed journal, that publishes manuscripts related to urban research and policy analysis of interest to both scholars and practitioners. Starting in 2020, UAA will sponsor a new refereed journal, *Race, Ethnicity and the City*, designed to create a discourse on issues of race, ethnicity and identity within and around urban spaces. UAA also sponsors Upsilon Sigma –The Urban Studies Honor Society, an international, multidisciplinary honor society dedicated to recognizing and encouraging excellence in scholarship, leadership, and engagement in urban studies and related fields.

The Urban Affairs Association hosts an international conference each spring in a different city. During that conference, UAA recognizes outstanding scholarship and service in the field of urban affairs through international awards. Although the 2020 conference was cancelled due to the current pandemic, award recipients are being announced now, and will be formally recognized at the next UAA conference.

This year, **Dr. Melissa Anne Currie** (Mississippi State University) and **Dr. Janni Sorensen** (University of North Carolina Charlotte) were selected as the recipient of the 2020 Best Article in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* Award for their article, “Repackaged “Urban Renewal”: Issues of Spatial Equity and Environmental Justice in New Construction, Suburban Neighborhoods, and Urban Islands of Infill.” The award is sponsored by Routledge | Taylor & Francis Group, the official publisher of the *Journal of Urban Affairs*.

Award Committee Assessment:

“We are pleased to announce Melissa Anne Currie and Janni Sorensen as the recipients of the award for the Best Paper in *Journal of Urban Affairs* for 2019 (volume 41). In their paper entitled “Repackaged “urban renewal”: Issues of spatial equity and environmental justice in new construction, suburban neighborhoods, and urban islands of infill” the authors shed light on both the deliberate nature of exclusionary/discriminatory practices, as well as the unintended consequences of well-intentioned, but short-sighted approaches to affordable housing development. Based on a case study of Charlotte, North Carolina, the authors addressed their research questions using simple but effective methods in their spatial analysis such as reviewing streets and aerial views from Google Earth. The paper is well written, and the demonstration is clear. This study on spatial equity



Pictured from left to right: **Janni Sorensen** (University of North Carolina Charlotte), **Melissa Anne Currie** (Mississippi State University)

and environmental justice brings new knowledge of interest for a broad audience of scholars and advocates interested in questions regarding planning for housing, community development and LULUs, land use and transportation planning, segregative and exclusionary practices, race and class in housing and cities. Their conclusions also have implications for future research on (sub)urban planning at different scales throughout the US and beyond.”

Award Committee:

Hélène Bélanger, Committee Chair (Université du Québec à Montréal), Maureen Donaghy (Rutgers University), Hee-Jung Jun (Sungkyunkwan University), Travis Young (Pennsylvania State University), Stacy Moak (University of Alabama Birmingham), Katharine Nelson (Rutgers University), and Daniel Scheller (University of Texas at El Paso)

Award Winner:

Dr. Melissa Anne Currie is an assistant professor of Landscape Architecture at Mississippi State University. She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Landscape Architecture from Cornell University and a doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in Geography and Urban Regional Analysis. Dr. Currie examines neighborhood-level community resilience using spatial, quantitative, and qualitative methods. The focus is how neighborhoods respond to a stressor event – whether from sudden shocks like natural disasters or through slow collapse such as following the Great Recession of the 2000s. Other research interests include health and the built environment, the health benefits of nature, and regional planning. Dr. Currie’s research draws from diverse fields including community resilience, design, public policy, human geography, landscape architecture, urban planning, public health, and environmental sociology while bridging the gap between academics and the public sector. Her work has recently been published in *the Journal of Urban Design*, *Community Development Journal*, *Housing and Society*, and *Action Research*. Before transitioning into a career in academics, Dr. Currie worked in the private sector building expertise in site design, master planning, low impact development, and New Urbanism design. She is a licensed landscape architect in the states of Virginia and Alabama.

Dr. Jani Sorensen holds a PhD in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois–Champaign Urbana. In 2008 she established the Charlotte Action Research Project (CHARP) at UNC Charlotte where she was then a new assistant professor. CHARP has long standing partnerships with local marginalized communities, with a mission to consistently work towards a larger agenda of social justice. Her research agenda is focused on neighborhood scale participatory urban planning and community organizing. Dr. Sorensen’s work has led to many journal articles and several grants from local government and foundations that have supported her ongoing work in Charlotte neighborhoods. In 2017 she received the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) “Excellence and Innovation Award for the Civic Learning and Community Engagement Award.” And in 2018 she received the UNC Charlotte Bonnie E Cone distinguished professorship in Community Engagement. In January 2020, she resigned from her position as associate professor at UNC Charlotte, for family reasons to return to her native country of Denmark. Here she is currently working on establishing herself as a consultant on topics centering on community engagement and participatory planning for local government and colleges in Denmark and internationally.