

## VUODA - APA ID MOU Ceremony Speech

Jing Zhang, Chair, APA International Division, November 21, 2023

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Thank you President Chinh. Thank you Ms. Hue.

Good morning, my colleagues in Vietnam and good afternoon, my colleagues in the United States.

It is an honor of the APA International Division to establish a partnership with VUPDA.

The International Division is a unit of the American Planning Association. Our mission is to foster the growth and advancement of international planning in the United States and to enhance the global landscape of planning through advocating for excellence and cultivating a dynamic network for innovation and collaboration.

Here I hope to highlight two things.

The first is that our partnership is about mutual learning. The United States has a lot of good experiences and bad experiences to share. There are things that can serve as stark warnings for other nations. Consider the American landscape with its car-centric development, detached single-family housing, and average commute times ranging from 20 to 40 minutes in private vehicles. These elements, once considered as embodiments of the so-called "American dream," now cast shadows on their sustainability. They paint a picture of a physical environment that, if universally pursued, could transform into a global nightmare.

We can learn a lot from our Vietnamese colleagues.

- **Incremental Development and Flexibility.** Vietnamese cities often show incremental development, where neighborhoods grow organically over time. American planners might learn the importance of flexibility in zoning regulations to accommodate gradual, community-driven expansion.
- **Mixed-Use Development.** Many Vietnamese urban areas incorporate mixed-use developments, with residential, commercial, and recreational spaces in close proximity. American planners could explore ways to promote mixed-use zones to create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.
- **Public Transportation Integration:** Vietnamese cities often have well-integrated public transportation systems, including buses and motorbike taxis. American planners might consider strategies to improve public transit connectivity to reduce reliance on personal vehicles.

- Informal Economy Integration: Vietnamese cities often have vibrant informal economies. American planners might explore ways to integrate and support informal businesses to enhance economic diversity.
- Affordable Housing Solutions: Vietnam has implemented various affordable housing solutions, such as government-subsidized housing and public-private partnerships. American planners could study these models to address housing affordability issues in U.S. cities.

The second point to emphasize is that the International Division is a bridge not a destination. The APA has 25 divisions. Areas range from city, regional, rural, federal, and international planning to environmental, hazard mitigation, housing, and transportation planning to many more topics. The International Division is able to reach out to other divisions when certain topics arise. The International Division also connects to other parts of the world, and our idea is that any planners, no matter where they are and what language they speak, can freely share their experience, ideas, frustrations, and inspirations.

That's all. Looking forward to our partnership in the years to come.