

Sustainability Hero



December 2023



Michael Kolber, AICP, PP

Senior Planner, City of Trenton
Mercer County, New Jersey

For four years, Michael Kolber has served as Senior Planner for the [City of Trenton](#) where he focuses on land use, sustainability, resilience and community development.

Aware of the crucial role that city-level planning can have on improving the health, social and economic wellbeing of Trentonians, Michael champions projects and plans that support sustainable communities, strategic growth, transit-oriented development and comprehensive, consensus based planning. His ability to function at a frenetic, fast pace is also a plus since he manages multiple projects with extensive demands and unpredictable curves every day. Michael is a stand-out sustainability leader who knows how to work within the system to secure resources, advocate for the betterment of Trenton and implement projects that make an impact.

Michael is responsible for implementing [Trenton 250](#), which is Trenton's award winning, long-range Comprehensive Master Plan that will guide the City from now to the 250th Anniversary of its incorporation in 2042. A major step in this process is the development of a new Land Development Ordinance. Michael is leading the five year process to rewrite the ordinance. The [Trenton 250 Land Development Ordinance Update](#) will help to better preserve, strengthen and protect the historic physical patterns of development that define the character of the City. It will direct reinvestment to targeted areas and create new opportunities for economic development, helping to make Trenton a more sustainable, livable and business-friendly community. In addition to the Land Development Ordinance, Michael has been involved in the development of new elements of the plan such as community health and wellness and climate resilience.

International Impact: Michael is the former Chair and still serves on the Board of the [American Planning Association International Division](#). The [Humanitarian Planning Committee](#) formed under his leadership, as well as initiatives like the [Ukraine Rebuilding Action Group](#). In previous positions, Michael ran the Student Travel Grant Program. He has served overseas as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso and as a Monitoring Specialist for the International Rescue Committee in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This experience contributes to his work in New Jersey. Michael explained, "A lot of the best examples for innovative planning come from outside the United States. We need to collaborate and be united with our international counterparts because addressing the major sustainability challenges of today will depend on it."



2023 Sustainable Jersey Certification: As a leader of Trenton’s Sustainable Jersey certification application, Michael collaborated with the [Trenton Green Team](#) and city staff to achieve silver-level certification in 2022. He said, “Sustainable Jersey is an important program for New Jersey. It provides the framework, structure and incentives that are necessary for municipalities to actually complete sustainability actions. The certification cycle provides time for staff to plan and execute the steps needed to achieve the actions.” To see all of the actions completed by the City of Trenton, review their [2022 Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#). Michael is a participant of New Jersey’s Urban Sustainability Hub. The group meets on a regular basis to share ideas and develop resources.

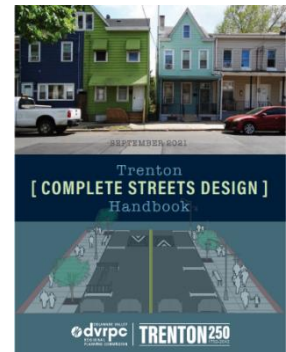
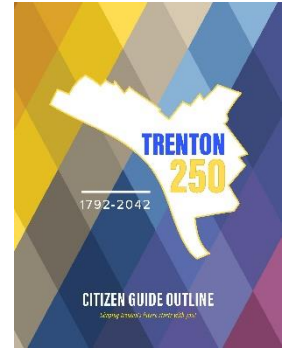
The City of Trenton has received over \$30,000 in funding from the [Sustainable Jersey Grants Program](#). A \$20,000 Sustainable Jersey Grant, funded by the PSEG Foundation, is supporting the development of the [Trenton Artwalk](#). This project is focused on making the gateway corridor from the Trenton Transit Center to surrounding neighborhoods friendlier and safer for non-vehicular traffic. A Sustainable Jersey grant funded the development of the Citizen Guide for the Trenton 250 Master Plan which helped residents learn about the plan and the sustainability and conservation goals outlined within it.

Complete and Green Streets Policy and Implementation: In 2022, Trenton completed work on a resolution establishing and implementing a [Complete and Green Streets Policy](#) for the City. The [ordinance](#), approved on July 7, 2022, mandates the use of the [Trenton Complete Streets Design Handbook](#) on all infrastructure projects in the public right of way. It established the formation of a Safe Streets for All Committee to support implementation and monitor projects as well as serve as a Task Force that will prioritize projects using the Vision Zero Action Plan that is currently in development in partnership with [Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission \(DVRPC\)](#).

In November 2023, the City of Trenton Division of Planning and the Office of Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning at the DVRPC were honored with the Complete Streets Excellence award for their community outreach efforts related to Our Streets: A Trenton Bike Plan for All. Our Streets was a summer event hosted by the City of Trenton and DVRPC in collaboration with the Trenton Cycling Revolution, East Trenton Collaborative, ArtWorks and the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund featuring free bike tune-ups, prizes, a family-friendly bike obstacle course, a team-painted street mural, free food and more. Attendees provided feedback on the Vision Zero Action Plan, the Trenton Bike Plan and the Trenton Trail Plan.

Under the Sustainable Jersey Land Use and Transportation action category, Trenton received a total of 60 points for this work through completion of the actions: [Bicycle and Pedestrian Audits](#) (10 points); [Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Improvement Projects](#) (30 points); [Bicycle and or Pedestrian Plan](#) (10 points); and [Complete and Green Streets for All Policy](#) (10 points).

Resilient Trenton: In 2022, Trenton held a series of meetings to get input and begin the development of a [Resilient NJ](#) vulnerability assessment and climate resilience action plan called [Resilient Trenton](#). These plans will build on Trenton 250 and the Mercer County Hazard Mitigation Plan. “The Resilient NJ planning looks at resilience a little different than our previous work,” said Michael. “It considers our emergency operations and infrastructure, and all the foundation elements. But, in addition, it will take into account a broader view of the social fabric of our city. It considers how we take care of our neighbors and the systems that we have for everyday living. Our goal is to develop a plan that will prepare us collectively and individually to be resilient.” The climate resilience action plan is targeted for completion in 2024. Trenton has completed Sustainable Jersey actions that support this planning: [Green Infrastructure Implementation](#) and [Natural Resource Inventory](#).



North Trenton/Battle Monument Choice Neighborhood Plan: A \$1.3 million Choice Neighborhoods Planning Initiative Grant was provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Trenton Housing Authority to fund the creation of a transformation plan for Donnelly Homes, the largest public housing development in Trenton, and the surrounding neighborhood. The North Trenton/Battle Monument Choice Neighborhood Plan addresses three core goals: replacing distressed public and assisted housing with high-quality mixed-income housing responsive to the surrounding neighborhood’s needs; improving income, health and youth education outcomes of households in the target neighborhood; and creating the ideal conditions for public and private reinvestment in a distressed neighborhood. Michael is the project manager moving this plan into implementation. He said, “The Choice Plan includes sustainability measures, including green buildings, complete streets, green infrastructure, parks improvements and public safety measures to improve walkability. The Plan is designed to meet the requirements of LEED-Neighborhood Development certification.” The design and installation of a complete street on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is one of the early action activities currently being implemented as part of this plan and will serve as a pilot for the new Trenton Complete Streets Design Handbook. The [North Trenton / Battle Monument Choice Neighborhood Plan](#) was accepted by HUD in December 2021 and was adopted as an element of the Trenton250 Master Plan in June of 2022. As part of the planning, over 200 household surveys were completed, and many meetings were held.



Community Health and Wellness Plan: In June 2019, Trenton Health Team published its newest Trenton Community Health Needs and Assets Assessment that shares the challenges and strengths identified by Trenton residents and community organizations, providing a “community diagnosis” or status report of residents’ health and well-being. In January 2021, the City of Trenton Planning Board voted to adopt the [Trenton Community Health and Wellness Plan](#) as an element of the Trenton 250 Master Plan. The Community Health and Wellness Plan is intended to provide a policy framework and action agenda for: expanding access to and the uptake of healthy foods; increasing opportunities and pursuit of physical activity; improving health literacy and access to healthcare services; and addressing unhealthy housing conditions in the City. Michael said, “Trenton is the first municipality in New Jersey to adopt a health element as part of its master plan. The team that is spearheading this work hopes that the implementation of the strategies in the Community Health and Wellness Plan, as well as the other Trenton 250 Master Plan elements, will lead to material changes in Trenton’s economic, social and physical environment over time, which will improve the health and wellness of Trenton residents.” The City of Trenton received 25 Sustainable Jersey certification points for this work through completion of the action: [Local Health Assessment and Action Plan](#).



Education and Experience: Michael has an M.S. in Urban Planning from Columbia University and a B.A. in Economics from Drew University. Before coming to the City of Trenton, Michael was an environmental planner at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection in the Office of Coastal and Land Use Planning. He was a consultant for the Sandy Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program at the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. He served as Program Manager for Community Building at the United Way of Greater Union County. He was a Community Board 12 Planning Fellow at the Manhattan Borough President's Office.

More about Michael: Michael grew up in East Brunswick New Jersey and graduated from East Brunswick High School. In his spare time, Michael likes to play chess and music. He is a bass player and has been in a band for 11 years, check out [EGoGo](#).

