



Mary Newsom, photo
courtesy Charlotte Urban
Institute

Mary Newsom, Dir of Urban Policy Initiatives, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, retired

Mary builds information bridges, linking powerful ideas to the people who need to hear them. She came to Charlotte as an Observer reporter, then editorial writer where she used that platform to educate readers on the vital importance of the community's transportation and land use decisions. She deepened her own understanding of issues by imbedding herself into the local community of planners and architects, listening and learning. A year at Harvard on a prestigious Nieman Fellowship deepened her expertise.

In 2011, she became the Urban Institute's Director of Urban Policy Initiatives. Upon her recent retirement from UNCC, her boss Jeff Michael called her "one of the Charlotte region's most important journalistic voices for quality planning, urban design and the value of public engagement to inform public policy."

But Michael's regard for her goes even deeper. Her unique and well-honed expertise had found just the perfect dissemination vehicle. More importantly, the Urban Institute had found a writer, editor and bridge builder who would take the research that had in many cases lay hidden on campus to a larger audience. She set about convincing academicians to bring their research and insights out of the ivory tower and share them with the public in more accessible forms.

The Urban Institute's website could become a journalistic platform now that they had someone to make that happen. Moreover, Mary had a deep understanding of local policy issues and the respect of policy makers. She created a companion website (PlanCharlotte.org) to fill the journalistic void she felt existed around urban policy issues.

Michael also notes that the popular City Walks she initiated "embody so much of what Mary's own career was about: the power of storytelling, information sharing and creativity to inspire better communities."