

WHAT IS A PLANNER?

Excerptions from publications by
U.S. Department of Labor
Occupational Outlook Handout

Planners develop long- and short-term land use plans to provide for growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities, while helping local officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems. Because local governments employ the majority of urban and regional planners, they often are referred to as community, regional, or city planners.

Planners promote the best use of a community's land and resources for residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational purposes. Planners may be involved in various other activities, including decisions on alternative public transportation system plans, resource development, and protection of ecologically sensitive regions. They address issues such as traffic congestion, air pollution, and the effect of growth and change on a community. They may formulate plans relating to the construction of new school buildings, public housing, or other infrastructure. Some planners are involved in environmental issues ranging from pollution control to wetland preservation, forest conservation, or the location of new landfills. Planners may also be involved with drafting legislation regarding environmental, social, and economic issues, such as sheltering the homeless, planning a new park, or meeting the demand for new correctional facilities.

Planners examine proposed community facilities such as schools to be sure these facilities will meet the changing demands placed upon them over time. They keep abreast of economic and legal issues involved in zoning codes, building codes, and environmental regulations. They ensure that builders and developers follow these codes and regulations. Planners also deal with land use issues created by population movements. For example, as suburban growth and economic development create more new jobs outside cities, the need for public transportation that enables workers to get to these jobs increases. In response, planners develop transportation models for possible implementation and explain their details to planning boards and the general public.

Before preparing plans for community development, planners report on the current use of land for residential, business, and community purposes. These reports include information on the location and capacity of streets, highways, airports, water and sewer lines, schools, libraries, and cultural and recreational sites. They also provide data on the types of industries in the community, characteristics of the population, and employment and economic trends. With this information and input from citizens' advisory committees, planners design the layout of land uses for buildings and other facilities such as subway lines and stations. Planners prepare reports showing how proposed projects can be carried out and what they will cost.



Above: A planner teaches about environmental planning at Earth Day. Planners interact with all age groups during education projects.

Planners use computers to record and analyze information and to prepare reports and recommendations for government officials and others. Computer databases, spreadsheets, and analytical techniques are widely used to project program costs and forecast future trends in employment, housing, transportation, or population. Computerized geographic information systems (GIS), enable planners to map land areas and overlay maps with geographic layers, such as population density and land use information. GIS compiles geographic information to efficiently and clearly display land use data for planners and citizens.



Above: Planners conduct public meetings to involve citizens in community planning initiatives.

Urban and regional planners often confer with land developers, civic leaders, and public officials. They may function as mediators in community disputes and present alternatives acceptable to opposing parties. Planners may prepare educational materials for community relations programs, speak at civic meetings, and appear before legislative committees and elected officials to explain proposals.

In large organizations, planners usually specialize in a single area such as transportation, demography, housing, historic preservation, urban design, environmental and regulatory issues, or economic development. In small organizations, planners must be able to do various kinds of planning.

Planners within a local government review and process various plans and applications for subdivision, housing, commercial developments, variances, conditional use permits and building permits. They also determine conformity with laws, regulations, policies and procedures; recommend approval, identify problems and analyze alternatives. These determinations are supported by a comprehensive plan, such as the Horizon Plan in East Baton Rouge Parish. In order for growth scenarios addressed in a comprehensive plan to be effective, city planners must implement their comprehensive plan. In East Baton Rouge Parish, planners implement development regulations through the Unified Development Code.

Planners must also provide information and assistance to developers, property owners and the public regarding laws, regulations, standards, policies and procedures related to the submission of plans, processing of applications and implementation requirements. Communicating and coordinating with other City departments and outside agencies is also a major responsibility.

A good planner must have certain knowledge and ability such as:

- Understanding the potential politics of a proposal
- Knowing how to apply the laws, standards, and policies in a positive way
- The ability to clearly present and organize data from numerous agencies to community stakeholders
- The ability to make recommendations that are supported by the facts and developed with enough attention to precedents and existing policies that they influence decision making
- The ability to maintain, the staff-commission relationship, and the staff-council relationship as well as the adequacy of agency products such as ordinances, the comprehensive plan, Geographic Information System, and special studies



Above: Planners assist Planning Commission members in decision making. Planner recommendations are considered at public hearings related to land use, zoning, subdivisions and site plans.

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