



American Planning Association
Making Great Communities Happen



WHAT IS... **COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING?**

The American Planning Association is an organization of planners and those interested in planning.

APA defines the purposes of planning as:

1. Helping to create communities of lasting value
2. Offering better choices for where and how people work and live
3. Engaging citizens, businesses, and civic leaders to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives.

The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, help planners, officials, and citizens by providing research, educational resources, practical advice and tools, and up-to-date information on planning.

Of all the types of urban planning, comprehensive planning is the most, well, comprehensive! Planning helps individuals and communities prepare for the future. Planning also helps communities adjust to new needs—such as changing technology. A comprehensive planner must look at just about everything to come up with the best plan they can for a community. From the number of people in the city to the number of trees in a neighborhood, a planner examines information comprehensively. Comprehensive plans are important because they guide the long-term future of a city.

Comprehensive planning usually asks these questions: Where are we and what problems do we face today? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? First, a comprehensive plan describes the current conditions of the region, city, or town. A very detailed study is conducted to determine how many people live in the area, what the economy is, and what infrastructure exists. Once the comprehensive planners have as much information as they can find about the region they are planning for, they next ask the residents, businesses, and leaders what the community should be in the future. Through surveys, community meetings, and “charrettes” (intense community workshops) planners get a good idea of the direction or goals for the community. Finally, the trickiest part is figuring out how to achieve the goals that the community wants. For example, a community with no parks determines that they want more parks in the future, but has no space or money for them. A creative solution a comprehensive planner might propose is to encourage rooftop gardens, community gardens in vacant lots, or to convert an old rail line into a walking trail.

Comprehensive planners must know many aspects of planning including transportation, environmental, and community planning. They also use other subjects such as zoning, economics, and even politics! There are lots of issues that a comprehensive planner must tackle, but it is also a job for very creative people that can think outside the box to solve problems.

MEET A PLANNER



Erin Aleman is a comprehensive planner who works in Chicago and the Chicago region.

1. What is a comprehensive planner?

Comprehensive planning takes into account all of the resources a community has and brings them together. This could include everything from transportation to the natural environment and economic development. Typically, comprehensive planners work on developing and implementing large-scale plans, called comprehensive plans.

2. What exactly does a comprehensive planner do?

A comprehensive planner works with municipalities, counties, regions, and major organizations and constituents to better understand a variety of planning-related issues—some are typical like housing, water, transportation, and land use, while others are a little out of the ordinary like workforce development. Think of it as making a pizza for seven of your friends, each with different likes and dislikes. Everyone has to come together to discuss the options and determine how to put all the toppings on in a way that makes each individual happy.

3. Why did you decide to be a comprehensive planner?

I decided to focus on comprehensive planning because I feel it is important to take a holistic approach to community issues and opportunities. It allows me to use a diverse set of skills and work on projects that are different every day. I also really like working with local residents to better understand what they care about in their communities.

4. What is craziest or funniest thing you've seen on the job or heard about?

I was working with a middle school STEM teacher to teach her class about the importance of planning. After doing research about the regional plan I had been telling them about, the students decided to work on a project to promote alternative transportation. They developed what they called a "wheel-in." The wheel-in was a day where they got their entire 6th grade to bike around the community and tell neighborhood residents about the benefits of biking—it's cheap, can improve air quality, and it's healthy. They made banners and handed out the brochures they had made at the train station. It was really exciting to see young people take planning in their community so seriously!

5. How can a student get involved with comprehensive planning?

Young people can get involved in comprehensive planning by participating in their local government. Many communities have planning or zoning committees that discuss these ideas monthly. Their meetings are open to the public and will give you a good idea of what types of ideas—housing, environment, business—your community has planned for the future.

For more information about planning for a youth audience, visit the American Planning Association's website at www.planning.org/kidsandcommunity and the *Kids' Planning Toolbox* blog at <http://blogs.planning.org/kids>.

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