



American Planning Association
Making Great Communities Happen



WHAT IS... **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.

Planning shapes cities, towns, regions, and even rural areas. Some communities are completely designed by planners, such as Greenbelt, Maryland. In other communities, planning helps determine how communities will grow and how they will adjust to change. Planning creates the vision for the community, identifies current problems, analyzes trends, engages community members in dialogue about goals and issues, and sets the framework for growth and change.

By using lots of data, good planning practices, and balancing the needs of citizens, businesses, and civic leaders, planners make great communities. Sometimes planning is called urban planning, city planning, or regional planning.

Planners may determine that the community needs more public transit or needs to encourage retail businesses in certain neighborhoods. Planners may help decide where a new water pumping plant is located and determine what the impact of that plant will be on the environment.

Planning is not an isolated activity; it involves all segments of the community. Planners help bring residents, businesses, politicians, and advocates together to create a vision for the community and how the community can achieve their goals. For example, possible goals would be to create affordable housing for more residents or to create parks with more features for children in neighborhoods.

While a city and private developers provide many things for the community without the help of planners—housing for high-income residents, movie theaters, retail shops, and many services—planning identifies any gaps in the needs of the community and helps coordinate them so that the city grows efficiently. Planners also work with builders to add improvements to construction projects. For example, planning may encourage building developers to provide park space when constructing a new group of houses.

Planners have the legal power to shape cities since planning influences the health, safety, and well-being of citizens. Therefore, planners will work with legal tools such as ordinances to ensure the buildings or developments are good for the community—for example, by allowing for new innovations such as solar panels, home businesses, and community gardens. Planning is done in many arenas—transportation, housing,

health, neighborhood development, urban design, environment, disaster prevention—the list goes on and on! Planners work in every state and around the world. They work in rural areas, suburban areas, and large cities. Planners also work for nonprofit organizations and multidisciplinary companies.

Some of the tools used by planners include geographical mapping systems, community meetings and workshops, and graphic designs of sites or buildings. Planners must be familiar with a range of information, such as population, health, jobs, and economic trends. With so many elements to planning, planners usually pick a topic that interests them the most. Some of these topics can be transportation, the environment, and even the physical design of the city. Planning is a HUGE subject with lots of elements to consider, so there is something for everyone with an interest in urban planning.



MEET A PLANNER



Jill Sutherland is a planner in Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

1. What is a planner?

A planner partners with communities to help them become wonderful places to live, work, grow up, and play.

They help decide what kinds of buildings should go where, where new parks might be needed, and what areas in the community are in need of changes to make them better places to be.

2. What exactly does a planner do?

A planner can do anything from interpreting a community's zoning code, determining what kinds of buildings are allowed in what places, and helping a community create a vision for what it wants to become, to reaching out to and educating community leaders on what can make their community better. They often get to do something different and exciting every day.

3. Why did you decide to be a planner?

I decided to become a planner because I believe that the environment a person grows up in shapes who they are. I wanted to help shape the built environment to become a place that fosters community interaction, pride, and open-mindedness.

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

The funniest thing I've seen on the job happened when I was helping a group of kids through a design workshop to get their ideas on how the area around their school could be better. They unanimously decided that ziplines had to be a part of their plan for their school. Because ziplines rule!

5. How can a student get involved with planning?

A student can get involved with planning by making sure his or her voice is heard when decisions are being made about new buildings or subdivisions in their community. Grown-ups often forget that a kid's only way of traveling is by walking or biking, so we have to remember that it's not all about the car! Sidewalks are important, and so are bike lanes. Kids have to get around safely too!

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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