



SO YOU WANT TO BE AN URBAN PLANNER?

What is Planning and an Urban Planner?

Planning shapes cities, towns, regions, and even rural areas. Some communities are completely designed by planners. 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.

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 its goals, such as how 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 because 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.

—From *What is Planning* flyer, American Planning Association

How do I become a planner?

Most planners hold bachelor's or master's degrees in Urban Planning from one of the 74 (U.S.) universities that have planning degree programs recognized by the Planning Accreditation Board. Some students pursue a master's in Urban Planning after obtaining degrees in such fields as environmental studies, journalism, political science, economics, public administration, planning or sociology. Different schools have different focuses in planning. The University of Kansas, Kansas State University, Missouri State University, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City offer either bachelor or master's Urban Planning programs.

Check out these websites for more information

American Planning Association:

www.planning.org/aboutplanning/

Kansas City Chapter of the American Planning Association:

www.kc-apa.org

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning:

http://www.acsp.org/education_guide/education_and_careers_in_planning

UMKC Department of Urban Planning + Design:

<http://info.umkc.edu/aupdl/>

KU Department of Urban Planning:

<https://urbanplanning.ku.edu/>

Missouri State Planning Undergraduate program:

<http://geosciences.missouristate.edu/Planning/>

Planetizen, a resource for urban planning news and career information: www.planetizen.com

City of Kansas City, Missouri City Planning & Development Department: <http://kcmo.gov/planning/>

How do I prepare in high school to be a planner?

While still in high school, take courses that prepare you more broadly for college including courses in English, history, and other humanities like social studies, communications/public speaking. These courses will help develop both your ability to put things into a broader context and enhance your communication skills. Problem-solving techniques can be developed through courses in science and mathematics. Courses in computers, including 3D modeling, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and communication software such as word processing programs and spreadsheet applications can be helpful in any urban planning career. Art courses including drawing, sketching and photography can help develop the ability to visualize, conceptualize, think creatively, and communicate visually.

High School students can also participate in the planning process around their own communities. Local governments regularly hold Planning Commission meetings and City Council meetings where government officials determine if plans for new development correspond with community plans. Public meetings are often held to gain public input on corridor- or city-wide plans. You can go to these meetings and add your voice to shaping the future of the city. While there, talk to the urban planners at the meeting who work for the municipality or a consulting firm.