



PLAN IT

What Is Planning?

Planners help to shape cities, smaller communities, and even rural areas. They help determine how communities will grow and how they will adjust to change. Their contribution to the design and development of communities is to bring together data, citizens' ideas and opinions, civic leaders' goals, and good planning practice into a deliberative process of community decision making. Often planning goes by the name of urban planning or city and regional planning.

Planners identify the problems facing the community, focusing in particular on the physical, built environment. They may determine that the community needs more public transit or needs to encourage retail businesses in underserved neighborhoods. Planners may help decide where a new water pumping and filtration plant is located and determine what the impact of that plant will be on the environment.

Planning is not an isolated activity; rather, it involves all segments of the community. Planners help create the process by which residents, business people, mayors and city council members, and advocates work together to create a vision for the community, the goals the community wishes to achieve for itself, and the actions it will take to reach the goals. An example of a goal may be creating more affordable housing for residents.

While the commercial market will provide many things for the community—housing for upper income residents, retail, and many

services—planning identifies the gaps in the needs of the community and helps to provide needed programs, development, and services. Planning will also work with commercial developers to add useful services to development projects. For example, planning may encourage the developers to provide parks.

Planning takes place within a legal framework. Therefore, planners will work with legal tools such as ordinances, to ensure the buildings and development meets the standards of health, safety, and welfare for the community, as well as allow for new innovations such as solar panels, home businesses, and mixed uses of buildings (including housing, shopping, services, etc.).

Planning is done in many arenas—transportation, housing, health, neighborhood development, urban design, environment, disaster prevention. Planners work in every state and around the world. They work in rural areas, suburban areas, and large cities. They function in the public sector within federal, state, and local governments. They also work in nonprofit organizations and within the private sector in real estate development companies and planning or multidisciplinary consulting firms.

Common tools used by planners include web-based geographical mapping systems, community meetings and workshops, and graphic designs of sites and buildings. Planners must be familiar with a range of information, such as population, health, jobs, the economy, and trends.





Profile of a Planner: Mariia Zimmerman

Mariia works for a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., called Reconnecting America. Reconnecting America promotes building great communities that are connected by transit, which includes trains and buses. It also shows how communities can have more affordable housing and diversity. Mariia helps plan transit projects and also gives talks and writes about transit, affordable housing, and diversity.

How did Mariia decide to work on transit?

One thing Mariia loves about transit is that good transit (and for her that is usually a train) makes it so much easier to get around a city, saves gasoline, and helps the environment. What's more, she would rather travel to work on a train, listening to her iPod and reading a good book, than sitting in a car in a traffic jam. She believes that we can work together to make sure that more kids, adults, grandparents—everyone—can have more transportation choices.

What are Mariia's goals as a planner?

Since becoming a city planner it has been important for Mariia to find ways to make our cities better places to live and work, and in

doing so protect our farmlands and open spaces for people and animals to enjoy. "We're all connected," she says. "We need to make sure that human and animal habitats are good places to live, work, play, pray, and learn."

How did Mariia become interested in city planning?

Mariia says: "I grew up on a farm in rural Minnesota and seldom went to the city. However, one particular trip that made a big impression on me was when I was in sixth grade and my family stayed in a high-rise hotel in downtown Minneapolis. From the window I could see for miles and was just amazed at how a city and all the streets worked together. The city at night was one of the most beautiful things I'd seen. My dad thought I was crazy. When I went to college, I loved my urban geography class that talked about how cities developed and the relationship between people and cities—a lot of it unchanged from the time of the Romans until today. The combination of history, economics, the environment, and architecture that planning includes just fascinated me and still does."

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

For more information about careers in planning, visit the American Planning Association's website at www.planning.org/careers

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