



Is Your Community a Great Place to Live?

You can help shape its future by getting involved in community planning.

Produced by Debra Sachs
Illustrations by Moria North

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Many forces are working to shape the future of your community.

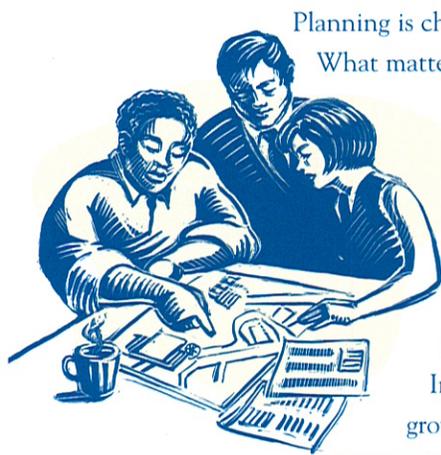
You can be one of them.

Whether we live in a city, suburb, or small town, we all want a healthy and safe place to live. We almost always want good schools, affordable housing, accessible shopping and recreation, cultural activities and places of worship — the mix of attractions that makes a community livable.

All our communities are constantly changing. Various economic and social forces are always at work. Sometimes that change is obvious; sometimes it is subtle or slow. But it is always happening. One powerful way that people can positively influence this change, for tomorrow and for generations to come, is to join in the cooperative work called community planning.

This brochure describes what community planning is, how it works, and how you can get involved.

Come to the table, roll up your sleeves, and lay out a future.



Planning is challenging work that, basically, anyone can do.

What matters most is that you care about your community, that you're willing to work with, talk with, and listen to others, and that you believe your own vision and effort matter.

If you make the effort, you can make a difference.

Improving the environment in which we live, grow, work, and play begins with identifying community values. What is important to you, and to your neighbors? Positive planning can have an impact on crime, jobs, young people — on virtually everything that matters to local citizens, if they say what matters.

Planning considers the whole.

The economy, the environment, and people are all part of a healthy community. To consider all of these, the planning process follows four phases:

COLLECTING DATA. Identifying trends in population, housing, employment. These are the forces of change at work.

DEFINING THE ISSUES. What is at stake as change occurs? What are the impacts on local services and the environment? What should be encouraged, discouraged, guided, or preserved?

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES. Citizens' shared vision and priorities for the future are built into a document — the community's plan.

ACTING ON THE VISION. The community's plan is implemented by enacting appropriate regulations, reviewing proposed development, and using other tools to influence change. As new issues come up, citizen planners continue to update and revise the community plan.

Taking stock.

What to keep.

Many communities have positive features that people want to preserve — a town green, village center, local businesses, scenic views, parks, rivers ... Streets, highways and paths serve vital needs, connecting people and neighborhoods with jobs, shopping, schools, and services.

What to improve.

Planning can guide positive change toward problems such as vacant stores, declining areas, overcrowded roads, and sprawling development. It's vital to plan for the efficient movement of people on local roads; it may also be important that economic and housing growth be encouraged or directed, and that environmental assets are protected or enhanced. Overall, the challenge is to locate housing, jobs, and services so they contribute to the community's health.

Creating a community assessment.

Each community faces unique issues. Developing a community assessment helps planners and citizens understand these. An assessment might include information on:

- population and housing trends;
- distribution of jobs and income;
- percentage of wages earned and spent locally;
- air and water quality;
- conditions of roads and public facilities (schools, parks, and libraries);
- development occurring in and outside the community center;
- energy consumption and fuels used;
- community services and programs for seniors, children, and others;
- natural resources; and
- other assets worth preserving.

The community assessment is the first step in planning for a sustainable future.



Defining goals and setting strategies.

Decide where you want to go ... so you can get there.

Once the planning process has identified local assets, trends, and issues, planners use that input to frame goals and develop strategies.

Maintaining livability has much to do with protecting natural, historic, and cultural resources. But the well-being of families and the quality of local services may also depend on attracting good jobs and preparing for business investment. Good, well-placed roads, and even public transit, may be vital for both prosperity and quality of life. Planning techniques such as zoning, impact fees, and building standards can be employed to pursue community goals with lasting impacts.

It all begins with people speaking up — and working together.



To learn more

For more information or to get involved in community planning, contact your town or city office, your local or regional planning commission, or your nearest chapter of the American Planning Association.

Write or contact us at: American Planning Association, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60603 (312)431-9100.

Visit our Web site at: www.planning.org

Concerned citizen or planning commissioner — the roles you can play.

People do the planning.

Community planning can only succeed if citizens work together. Some solutions come easier than others: It can be simple to locate bus shelters, much harder to decide where a new school will best serve the future. But if citizens don't help guide development, the consequences — chaotic change, declining downtowns, wasted resources — can be harmful and permanent.

How to make your voice heard:

- Organize or attend neighborhood meetings that focus on particular issues and solutions, such as creating a new playground to give kids a safe place to gather.
- Coordinate a community planning project for students or youth groups.
- Speak up at community-wide meetings that focus on broader issues, such as priorities for a new community plan.
- Talk to governing boards, to raise the awareness of local leaders about problems and proposals for action.

Becoming a community decision-maker.

The people who sit on planning commissions and town (or city) councils are citizens who have been appointed or elected. Planning commissions develop community plans, building on citizen input; town and city councils put those plans into effect. Planning commissions, recreation committees, and other local boards also review proposed developments for consistency with the community's plan.

By volunteering to serve on your planning commission, or running for local office, you can play a key role in shaping your community's future.

