

## CITY PLANNER JOBS AND CITY PLANNER JOB DESCRIPTION

City planners design cities, from the height of buildings, to the width of streets, to the number of street signs. They decide everything from where to put lamp posts, and what they should look like, to whether or not to build a new subway line. While deciding how everything in a city is set up may at first seem like a wonderfully creative position, the career combines a professional's knowledge of engineering principles, the ability to compromise, political wrangling skills, and financial wizardry. It takes strong analytic skills and force of will to be a successful urban planner.

Every building or structure must be designed with an understanding of its relationship to other aspects of the city, such as coordinating the construction of water and power facilities while still allowing people access to light, heat, and fresh water, or designing housing complexes that will be close to public transportation. Aesthetic design, another feature that the planner must blend into his delicate mix of considerations, can be the most hotly debated part of the profession. The urban planner has to design with an understanding of the policies of the city and create economically viable plans. This last can be difficult - urban planning projects always run over budget, and even the most frugal and spare design can be expected to run into bureaucratic opposition.

Before the planner can even begin to plan the buildings, site surveys, demographic surveys, economic surveys, and environmental surveys are performed, to determine the needs of the community and encourage public participation in the process; this is where the planner with strong interpersonal skills distinguishes himself from the one without. If the planner is redeveloping an area (as opposed to groundbreaking or landfilling it), he must evaluate already-constructed buildings and the existing character of neighborhoods to determine what can be done to the standing structures.

During these phases, planners work closely with economic consultants to formulate a plan that makes sense for both the economy of the region and the residents. The next step is to create maps and designs. When the architects draft plans for the construction of bridges, radio and telephone towers, and other large pieces of infrastructure, the urban planner works closely with them. The planner does substantial research regarding zoning and landscaping laws.

Occasionally, urban planners must also design or refurbish the town's zoning regulations to enforce management of the land and building usage, in the manner that is best for the region. He meets with community groups to obtain information on transportation and land usage. Financing is a delicate aspect of the profession which requires that the planner unite social, budgetary, and developmental concerns to respond to the community's need for progress while still presenting a fiscally sound proposal to governments and private investors.

Urban developers are employed by many different agencies, and many travel throughout the country to find continuous employment. Recent graduates should look to their state's Department of Transportation or look into civil engineering courses sponsored by the Army Corps of Engineers. Experienced engineers often work in private firms or with general contractors, where the planner enjoys far more independence.

### Paying Your Dues to Become a City Planner

Urban planners should have an undergraduate degree in an area such as civil engineering, architecture, or public administration. Most schools do not offer undergraduate degrees in structural engineering, but many employers look favorably on candidates who have studied SE on the master's level. The Master's degree in city or regional planning or structural engineering is the highest laurel, respected by all employers. One thirty-year structural engineer noticed that many recent graduates handle textbook problems wonderfully, but do not recognize real life problems. While studying for a master's degree, students often do internships to acquire as much practical experience as possible to alleviate this problem. Internships can convert to paid positions upon graduation.

After four years of working full time, urban planners are eligible to take a step-one licensing test. There are two of these tests (step one and step two); which one a planner takes depends on his interests and area of expertise. After getting this license and working for four additional years, serious candidates take another test to obtain the title Professional Engineer. These certifications are not required, but they are respected within the profession. Generally, acquiring these licenses leads to a promotion and an increase in salary.

### Careers Related to Being a City Planner

Geotechnical engineers explore subsurface areas to determine if the soil and rock will hold up the structure. Architects and draftsmen design the structures. Housing specialists relay the community's needs to the planner. Transport planners design plans for public transportation systems and roads. Any of these professions provides a solid home to the migrating ex-urban planner.

### The Past And Future of Being a City Planner

Urban planning began in the U.S. in the early twentieth century as a response to the rapid development of suburban towns and the renovations of historical cities. Laws placing the control and regulation of building in the government's hands were passed in New York in 1916. Now, every city and many towns have offices for urban planning and development.

### Quality of Life

#### Two Years Out

While, at any given time, two-thirds of urban planners work for the government, neophyte planners find themselves in their employ in even larger percentages. The novice planner is working under the supervision and guidance of other planners. Many work as interns for part of these initial years. Hours can be long.

#### Five Years Out

The urban planner's responsibilities increase and he develops a specialty, such as housing, land use, or zoning. Many planners are becoming quite adept at pitching ideas, working within constrained budgets, and political maneuvering. The majority of planners who leave the profession migrate about this time, fed up by lack of professional progress or failure to pass licensing exams.

#### Ten Years Out

As urban planners they now lead projects and create policy. Many have become directors or senior planners. A number have mentor roles where they train and educate newer members of the profession.

### Professional Profile

# of people in profession:	10,000
average hours per week:	45

### Professionals Read

Journal of the American Planning Association

Planning

Transportation Journal

### Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

*City Hall*

*The Power Broker*

*Atlas Shrugged*

*Olmstead*

### Major Employers

NYC Transit Authority

370 Jay Street

Contact local government infrastructure committees for more information. Room 611

Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel: 718-834-7075

### You'll Have Contact With

Bankers

Civil Engineers

Government Officials

Sociologists

**Major Associations**

American Planning Association

1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW

Suite 400

Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-872-0611

Fax: 202-876-0643

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