



# What is planning? What do planners do?

Over a century ago, Canadians from rural areas began moving to larger centres looking for better opportunities. This transformation spawned some of the most important questions we face today. How do we build the future without destroying the past? How do we balance social and ecological health with economic growth? How do we meet everyone's needs in innovative yet practical and affordable ways? Professional planners are forward looking and, therefore, equipped to ask these questions and then to help find answers to positively shape communities and environments.

## What is planning?

Planning, in general, is systematic decision-making that leads to informed action. Community planning, in particular, is an evolving process unique to each community that envisions and shapes where and how people live, work, and play. Intended outcomes are plans and policies that balance people, communities, environment, and economy. Community planning is an

ever-changing and increasingly important field. As cities, towns, and regions everywhere change and grow,

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## What specialties does planning offer?

Most planners perform their work in one or more particular fields of specialization within the larger planning profession. While some planners spend their entire careers within one of these specialties, most will move between them or find employment opportunities that combine them. Specialties include:

- Land-use planning and development
- Regional, urban, or rural planning
- Infrastructure and transportation planning
- Parks and environment planning
- Social, cultural, or heritage planning
- Housing analysis and planning
- Economic development planning
- Stakeholder education and community engagement
- Project management and planning
- International development planning

## What do planners do?

Planners create plans and associated policies that support a community's vision for the future. These can be:

- overarching plans (e.g., integrated community sustainability plans, official community plans)
- specific strategies such as parks or heritage plans
- regulatory tools and policies such as zoning, neighbourhood, and environmental plans.

Planners typically undertake a variety of activities, depending on their sector (public or private), location (rural or urban), and focus (general or specialized). They routinely:

- Facilitate community visioning activities
- Research and present data for consideration by various stakeholders (e.g., demographics, social and cultural issues, environmental and economic impacts)
- Develop and recommend plans and policies for consideration by various decision-makers (e.g., for land use, environment, energy, transportation, housing, parks, heritage)
- Consult with landowners, interest groups, and citizens during the development of plans and policies
- Implement, uphold, and evaluate plans and policies, often along with people from other organizations
- Review and facilitate development proposals and other submissions for legality and suitability.

## What is planning? *continued*

there is mounting demand for planners to guide and manage these changes innovatively, yet practically and affordably.

Key components of good community planning include research, process integration, inclusion, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation.

**RESEARCH:** Communities are continually changing. Informed planners use data to interpret ever-changing statistics, trends and impacts. Resulting information is used to support project proposals and policy recommendations.

**PROCESS:** A good process drives the development of a good plan. Proactive planners know that citizens deserve and expect to be involved in planning processes, and that these processes should be compelling, systematic, and designed to engage stakeholders authentically and transparently.

**INTEGRATION:** Every planning decision impacts a community's social, cultural, environmental, and economic health over time. Progressive planners research and report diverse short- and long-term implications of a decision to guarantee full disclosure and, therefore, informed choices.

**INCLUSION:** Planning processes involve people from various sectors with diverse interests. Responsible planners balance

public and private interests by considering and weighing the goals of good governance, public sentiment, environmental impact, and economic opportunity when evaluating proposals and developing plans.

**FACILITATION:** People have strong feelings and opinions about their neighbourhoods, communities, and regions. Skilled planners navigate multiple interests and voices by respecting conflicting views, enabling informed discussion and decision-making, and facilitating the development of solutions agreeable to all parties.

**IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION:** A plan is only as good as the action it inspires. Having said that, all plans involve change, and change is usually difficult. Successful planners develop practical action plans and continually evaluate challenges, opportunities, successes, and failures.

## Where do planners work?

Planners work in rural and suburban areas and cities in every country around the world. In Canada, they work in the public sector for federal, provincial, and local governments or agencies as well as in academia. In the private sector, they represent consulting firms, private companies, and non-profit organizations. Planners also contribute through non-profit and trade organizations such as the Planning Institute of BC.

## Who do planners work with?

Planners almost always work as part of a team. Depending on their employers and their areas of specialty, planners work with a variety of people from different sectors and industries. Public-sector planners, for example, work



internally with elected officials and staff in administration, public works, and parks. They also collaborate with other land-use professionals such as realtors and surveyors, academics such as scientists and economists, community health and social service providers, environmental professionals, and design experts such as engineers, architects, and landscape architects. Planners must also engage with communities, stakeholders, and citizens throughout the planning process.

## What are the rewards of planning?

The planning profession offers many potential rewards for people who are passionate about communities' social, cultural, environmental, and economic health, and who enjoy research, communication, collaboration, and flexible work schedules. Currently there are employment opportunities for graduates of planning schools in the public and private sectors of most municipalities across Canada. The salary range for a new planner is on par with graduates of engineering or architecture with the same level of experience. ■



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