



American Planning Association  
Making Great Communities Happen



## WHAT IS... **COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING?**

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

APA 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, businesses, 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.

**Of all the types of urban planning, comprehensive planning is the most, well, comprehensive! Planning helps individuals and communities prepare for the future. Planning also helps communities adjust to new needs—such as changing technology. A comprehensive planner must look at just about everything to come up with the best plan they can for a community. From the number of people in the city to the number of trees in a neighborhood, a planner examines information comprehensively. Comprehensive plans are important because they guide the long-term future of a city.**

Comprehensive planning usually asks these questions: Where are we and what problems do we face today? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? First, a comprehensive plan describes the current conditions of the region, city, or town. A very detailed study is conducted to determine how many people live in the area, what the economy is, and what infrastructure exists. Once the comprehensive planners have as much information as they can find about the region they are planning for, they next ask the residents, businesses, and leaders what the community should be in the future. Through surveys, community meetings, and “charrettes” (intense community workshops) planners get a good idea of the direction or goals for the community. Finally, the trickiest part is figuring out how to achieve the goals that the community wants. For example, a community with no parks determines that they want more parks in the future, but has no space or money for them. A creative solution a comprehensive planner might propose is to encourage rooftop gardens, community gardens in vacant lots, or to convert an old rail line into a walking trail.

Comprehensive planners must know many aspects of planning including transportation, environmental, and community planning. They also use other subjects such as zoning, economics, and even politics! There are lots of issues that a comprehensive planner must tackle, but it is also a job for very creative people that can think outside the box to solve problems.